

EPI Update for Friday, December 14, 2012
Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE)
Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH)

Items for this week's EPI Update include:

- **Flu update**
- **The “*stomach flu*” is NOT the flu**
- **Carbon monoxide exposure during winter weather**
- **Direct secure messaging FREE for six months**
- **Influenza vaccine poem from JAMA – *Myth Dispelled***
- **Meeting announcements and training opportunities**

Flu update

Influenza incidence activity in Iowa has increased from regional to widespread. For this reporting week, the State Hygienic Laboratory (SHL) confirmed a total of 118 cases of seasonal influenza from Iowa's sentinel system, including 63 influenza A (H3), 48 influenza A (subtyping pending), and seven influenza B. The percent of both influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) rapid tests that tested positive increased from previous weeks. The number of influenza-associated hospitalizations also increased and there were 23 cases reported from sentinel hospitals for this reporting period.

The State Hygienic Laboratory has identified three strains of influenza - influenza A (H3N2), 2009 H1N1, and influenza B - circulating in Iowa. The increasing number of flu cases is a strong reminder that it is time to get vaccinated. All Iowans over 6 months of age are encouraged to get vaccinated against the flu to protect themselves and those around them from illness.

To ensure protection from influenza during the holidays, get vaccinated now. Because of travel and socializing with family and friends, the holidays can be a time of high risk for getting the flu. Because it can take up to two weeks for full protection to develop after vaccination, now is the time for anyone not yet immunized to be vaccinated.

For more information about influenza, visit www.idph.state.ia.us/Cade/Influenza.aspx and for influenza activity reports, visit www.idph.state.ia.us/IdphArchive/Archive.aspx?channel=FluReports.

The “*stomach flu*” is NOT the flu

Currently, both norovirus and influenza activity are ongoing across the state. Norovirus is the major cause of gastrointestinal illness and outbreaks in Iowa, and is often mistakenly referred to as “stomach flu.” While these two illnesses are completely different and caused by unrelated viruses, people often expect the influenza vaccine to prevent norovirus, complaining that “I had the flu shot but got the stomach flu anyway.”

Please help the public understand the difference between norovirus and influenza and let's all stop using the term “stomach flu.”

Carbon monoxide exposure during winter weather

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless, poisonous gas that can cause sudden illness and death. Risks of CO poisoning may increase during severe winter storms, since power outages occur and alternative sources of heat (such as charcoal grills) may be used indoors. Risk of winter CO poisoning can also occur when cars are idled in attached garages to “warm them up.” Before idling a car to warm it up, back out of an attached garage.

Symptoms and signs of carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and altered mental status. The Iowa Statewide Poison Control Center (800-222-1222) offers 24/7 consultation to the public and physicians on CO treatment.

Unintentional CO exposure accounts for about 15,000 emergency department visits and 500 unintentional deaths in the United States each year. For more information, see www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5402a2.htm.

Direct secure messaging FREE for six months

Iowa health care professionals now have an efficient and secure tool for transferring patient information to other providers outside their organizations. The [Iowa Health Information Network](#) (IHIN) is offering Direct Secure Messaging FREE for six months to any health care provider who returns a completed and signed Direct Secure Messaging Participation Agreement & User Listing Form to Iowa e-Health by Dec 31, 2012.

Direct Secure Messaging through the IHIN allows you to send and receive referral documents, test results, continuity of care documents, patient encounter notes, billing information and more. Please visit www.iowahealth.org or click to view the [promotional flyer](#). For more information, call 866-924-4636.

Influenza vaccine poem from JAMA – *Myth Dispelled*

The flu vaccine cannot give you the flu, I tell him.
It's dead virus, there's nothing alive about it.
It can't make you sick. That's a myth.
But if we bury it in the grassy knoll
of your shoulder, an inch under the stratum corneum,
as sanctioned by your signature in a white-coated ceremony presided over by
my medical assistant and then mark the grave with a temporary non-stick headstone,
the trivalent spirit of that vaccine has a 70 to 90 percent chance of warding off
the Evil One, and that's the God's honest truth.

Adam Possner, MD: *December 5, 2012; JAMA*

Meeting announcements and training opportunities

None

We wish everyone a happy and healthy week!

Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology

Iowa Department of Public Health

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