

EPI Update for Friday, March 23, 2007
Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology
Iowa Department of Public Health

Items for this week's EPI Update include:

- **New strain of norovirus makes the news**
- **Is there *Listeria* your potato salad?**
- **Spring rabies reminders**
- **Correction**
- **Meeting announcements and training opportunities**

New strain of norovirus makes the news

State and local public health departments have become familiar with norovirus as it has been found or suspected to be the cause of many outbreaks of gastrointestinal disease investigated in Iowa in the past several years. More recently, a report about a new strain of norovirus was discussed in a March 10, 2007 report in ProMED, an online reporting system for outbreaks of emerging diseases and toxins. This new strain of norovirus is suspected as the cause of a number of recent outbreaks. According to ProMED, this "wave of intense gastrointestinal infections" has overwhelmed hospitals, nursing homes, and college dormitories across New England and the nation this winter. The report also states that the finding gives an important clue to the "severity and breadth of this season's outbreak, which has alarmed disease specialists because so many adults and children have become so sick."

Currently, there are at least five known norovirus genogroups (GI, GII, GIII, GIV and GV), which in turn are divided into at least 31 genetic clusters. UHL offers a molecular assay for norovirus, which can quickly detect the virus in clinical specimens. In the future, UHL hopes to be able to provide the identification of these genogroups, which will aid the epidemiologists in their investigations.

Most foodborne outbreaks of norovirus illness arise though direct contamination of food by an ill food handler. Other outbreaks have had water or environmental sources. Vomiting has been shown to be an important source of infection to others in close proximity. Also, vacuuming dried vomit may cause re-aerosolization of the virus.

Preventive measures include strictly following of hand washing practices, not allowing ill persons to go to work or school (especially day care centers and food handling jobs), and adequate cleaning after vomiting and diarrheal contamination of the environment. For more on norovirus, consult the EPI Manual online at

http://www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/common/pdf/epi_manual/norovirus.pdf .

Is there *Listeria* in your potato salad?

On Friday, March 16, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture released a warning about potato salad that may be contaminated with the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes*. These lots of potato salad have been found in stores in six states, including Iowa. The contamination was first discovered after sampling the product during a routine inspection; to date, no illnesses have been reported. The manufacturer has issued a voluntary recall and is advising consumers to return their recalled product to the store where they purchased it for a full refund. For more information on the recalled product, including lot numbers, expiration dates, and stores where the product was sold, visit www.mda.state.mn.us/hottopics/listeriaoutbreak.htm.

Human cases of listeriosis have been associated with consuming raw or contaminated milk or milk products like soft cheeses, contaminated vegetables, and uncooked ready-to-eat meats (i.e. hot dogs, sandwich/deli meats). *Listeria* is one of only a few bacteria that can grow in refrigerators. While anyone can get listeriosis, but it is most often diagnosed in newborns, the elderly, people with compromised immune systems, and pregnant women. The incubation period is anywhere from 3-70 days after the exposure (the average is about 3 weeks) and the symptoms may include a mild fever. *Listeria* can also cause meningitis, resulting in a sudden fever, intense headache, nausea, vomiting, delirium and coma. Pregnant women may only have minor symptoms, but their infants can be stillborn or can be born infected (resulting in high mortality rates).

Those at high risk (i.e. the elderly, immuno-compromised people, pregnant women) should avoid ready-to-eat foods, smoked fish and unpasteurized milk and milk products like soft cheeses. They should also thoroughly cook all left over foods and foods like hot dogs until steaming hot. For more information on listeriosis, consult the Iowa EPI Manual online at www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/common/pdf/epi_manual/listeriosis.pdf.

Spring rabies reminder

Calls to IDPH with questions about rabies increase in the spring when bats emerge from hibernation and people begin to spend more time outside. The rabies virus is usually transmitted by saliva through a rabid animal bite. Because of rabies immunization of dogs and cats in the United States and other rabies prevention efforts, human rabies is a rare disease here. Keep these points in mind to keep rabies a rare disease:

- The only pets that have approved rabies vaccines available are dogs, cats and ferrets. Skunks, raccoons and other wild animals should not be kept as pets and cannot be vaccinated against rabies.
- If you find a bat in a room where someone has been sleeping, is a young child or otherwise not able to say I was awake and I know I wasn't bitten, a bat bite should be assumed. Thus the bat should be tested for rabies or if the bat is unavailable for testing, rabies shots would be recommended.

- A 10-day confinement/quarantine of the biting animal (until 10 days after the bite) is recommended following a bite by a dog, cat or ferret, regardless of vaccine status of the animal.
- Everyone should avoid contact with wild or stray animals.

Information on rabies and rabies exposure assessment trees (which are useful in deciding if a person has been exposed to rabies and when animal confinement is appropriate) and information on use of rabies vaccine and rabies immune-globulin, can be found at www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/rabies.asp.

Correction

The link in last week's article on guidelines for infection control of influenza for long-term care facilities was incorrect. This is the correct link:
www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/longtermcare.htm.

Meeting announcements and training opportunities

There are no meeting announcements this week.

Have a healthy and happy week!

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