

EPI Update for Friday, May 4, 2007
Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology
Iowa Department of Public Health

Items for this week's EPI Update include:

- **Governor Culver appoints Tom Newton as Iowa Director of Public Health**
- **School outbreak in southwestern Iowa**
- **Hepatitis A in southwestern Minnesota**
- **Lt. Governor Judge marks May as "Asthma Awareness Month"**
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announce a new Web site**
- **Correction to last week's update**
- **Meeting announcements and training opportunities**

Governor Culver appoints Tom Newton as Iowa Director of Public Health

On Monday, April 30, Governor Chet Culver appointed Tom Newton as the new Iowa director of Public Health. Prior to this appointment, Newton served as the director of the Division of Environmental Health, a division within the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH).

"I am thrilled that Tom Newton has agreed to serve as director of this important state agency," said Governor Culver. "Tom has more than 10 years of experience in public health. In addition, he has skillfully managed the Division of Environmental Health and has the experience necessary to lead the team as Public Health director."

"To serve as director of Public Health is a great honor and I want to thank Governor Culver for giving me this opportunity," Newton said. "The Governor is committed to keeping Iowans safe and healthy, and I will do everything I can as director to keep Iowa prepared and ready to respond to matters concerning public health."

Tom Newton's biography

Tom Newton received his Bachelor of Arts at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) in 1994, and later received his Masters of Public Policy at UNI in 2002. From 2002 to the present, Newton has served as the director of the Division of Environmental Health at IDPH. From 2000 to 2002, Newton worked as a community health consultant within IDPH, and from 1997 to 2000 served as a public health officer for the Black Hawk County Health Department in Waterloo. Newton has served as president of the Iowa Environmental Health Association, and is also a member of the National Environmental Health Association, the Iowa Public Health Association and

the American Public Health Association. In 2004, Newton received the Governor's Golden Dome Leader of the Year award within IDPH.

A native of Zearing, IA (Story Co.), Newton currently lives in Windsor Heights.

School outbreak in southwestern Iowa

A few weeks ago, CADE received a call from a school in southwestern Iowa reporting that they had received calls from the parents of 30 students with severe vomiting that had begun during the previous night. During the day on Friday, the school nurse saw an additional 32 children with similar symptoms. The students were sent home. Most students (95 percent) were in kindergarten through fourth grades. Although vomit specimens are not ideal for testing for a norovirus, the suspected cause of illness in these cases, specimens were sent to the University Hygienic Lab for testing. (If vomit is the only specimen available, it should be sent for testing since bacteria and bacterial toxins can be found in vomit specimens.)

The majority of the illness in the kindergarten children occurred in those who used the same lunch serving line (of two possible lines). This suggested that something happened to the food in this line, but not the other line or at the other schools serving the same food. It is unclear how that food might have become contaminated. Public health recommended that school administrators ask ill students and staff to stay home from school (until formed stools are produced). We also recommended the school perform a thorough environmental cleaning (especially of common surfaces like hand rails), continue cleaning up all vomit quickly and with appropriate disinfectant, and encourage good handwashing.

Remember, there is concern that hand sanitizers (alcohol gels) may not kill viruses like norovirus. Thus, it is extremely important to wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water for at least 15 seconds to prevent the spread of these viruses.

Hepatitis A in southwestern Minnesota

The Minnesota Department of Health is investigating two cases of hepatitis A in food workers at a restaurant in the southwest Minnesota town of Slayton (about 30 miles north of the Iowa border). Restaurant patrons could have been exposed between April 9 and May 1. Immunoglobulin (IG) can be given within 14 days of exposure to the hepatitis A virus to provide protection against developing the infection. Lyon Lincoln Murray Pipestone County Public Health Services is planning a clinic to provide IG to people who ate at the restaurant, or at events catered by that restaurant, between April 20 and May 1. For more information, go to the Minnesota Department of Health news release at www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/hepa050207.html.

Lt. Governor Judge marks May as “Asthma Awareness Month”

In honor of World Asthma Day, Lt. Governor Patty Judge has asked that Iowans remember those Iowans who are affected by Asthma. Governor Culver has also proclaimed the month of May as “Asthma Awareness Month” in Iowa and asked that all Iowans be mindful of the effects of asthma. Joining with the Iowa Department of Public Health, Lt. Governor Patty Judge wants to ensure that Iowans who have asthma and their families are empowered, knowledgeable and capable of taking responsibility for their own health outcomes.

“Proper diagnosis and effective management of asthma symptoms can significantly reduce suffering and deaths caused by this disease,” said Lt. Governor Patty Judge. “Educating the public about the signs and symptoms of asthma can lead to a reduction in death, medical costs and a reduction in lost educational time and overall productivity.”

To help raise awareness of this issue, Lt. Governor Judge, a former nurse, will spend time with children at the Asthma Adventure Camp in Boone the week of July 22-28. Keeping air clear of allergens and irritants found in homes, work and school can help the more than 200,000 Iowa children, teens and adults who suffer from asthma. Asthma is a chronic disease that causes the airways of the lungs to tighten. In Iowa, asthma causes nearly 50,000 emergency room visits, 12,000 hospitalizations, and 45,000 unscheduled office visits each year. It is the most common chronic disease in children; however, it is often misdiagnosed. Mold, dust mites, secondhand smoke, cockroaches, cats, dogs, and chemical products like cleaning supplies can trigger an asthma attack. During an asthma attack, the airways get narrow making it hard to breathe. Signs of an asthma attack include trouble breathing, wheezing, coughing, chest pain and chest tightness.

Iowans, especially children, with asthma are encouraged to have an asthma action plan. An asthma action plan helps a person effectively manage their asthma. A sample of an asthma action plan is available on the IDPH Web site at www.idph.state.ia.us/hpcdp/common/pdf/asthma/asthma_action_plan.pdf.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announce a new Web site

On Thursday, April 19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) unveiled a new Web site designed to improve the usability and performance of www.cdc.gov. This new site provides better access to health and safety topics, data and statistics, news and events, and expanded tools and resources, as well as an improved search engine. The new Web site is user-centered, based on research, and is the product of extensive user testing of CDC’s principal audiences.

The new features of www.cdc.gov include:

- CDC Features - timely articles keep you informed on important health topics;
- Health and Safety Topics - content organized for better browsing;
- CDC For You - CDC resources grouped for specific audiences;
- New Search Engine - relevant search results and "suggested topics"
- A-Z Index - alphabetical listing of all of CDC's online information;
- Top 20 List - see what's popular on CDC.gov;
- Data & Statistics - public health data, survey results, and trends;
- Tools & Resources - calculators, photos, podcasts, and other helpful tools;
- Publications - MMWR, EID, and other journals, newsletters, periodicals;
- What's New - quick links to what's new on CDC.gov;
- E-mail Updates - CDC.gov updates emailed to your inbox; and
- Tag Cloud - graphic representation of most requested CDC.gov topics.

Correction to last week's update

In last week's update, the number of TB cases in Minnesota for 2006 was inaccurately reported. The correct number of TB cases in MN for 2006 was 217. We apologize for the error.

Meeting announcements and training opportunities

Iowa Immunization Conference

"Immunize for a Better Life," sponsored by the Iowa Department of Public Health, Bureau of Disease Prevention and Immunization will be presented on June 7 at the Hy-Vee Conference Center, 5820 Westown Parkway in West Des Moines. Hear renowned speakers share the latest information on immunizations. Speakers include: William Atkinson, MD, MPH; Paul Offit, MD; Patricia Quinlisk, MD, MPH; Patricia Stinchfield, RN, MS, CPNP; and Jean Thomas.

The registration fee is \$40 and the deadline for registration is May 25. To register, contact www.trainingresources.org or call 515-309-3315.

Have a healthy and happy week!

Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology
Iowa Department of Public Health
800-362-2736