

EPI Update for Friday, October 1, 2010
Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE)
Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH)

Items for this week's EPI Update include:

- IDPH issues health recommendations for working with moldy crops
- *Cryptococcus gattii* infections on the rise in the Pacific Northwest
- Meeting announcements and training opportunities

IDPH issues health recommendations for working with moldy crops

The extensive flooding that occurred this year may cause additional health concerns for Iowa's farmers and those working in the grain industry. IDPH recommends that respiratory protection be worn by individuals who will be involved in the removal or destruction of crops that were covered by flood waters and show signs of extensive mold. IDPH recommends a properly fitting, NIOSH-approved and certified "N-95" respirator be worn during the removal or destruction of these crops. Individuals with underlying respiratory or cardiovascular health problems should consult their medical provider before working with moldy crops, and should not wear a respirator without the approval of their medical provider.

Symptoms of exposure to moldy crops may include cough, chest tightness, malaise, headache, muscle aches, and fever. For some individuals, exposure to massive amounts of moldy grain can result in conditions called "organic dust toxic syndrome" and "hypersensitivity pneumonitis."

Medical providers and agricultural workers can find more information regarding respiratory personal protective equipment (PPE) online at agrisafe.org/user/File/AgriSafe-respiratory.pdf or by contacting an AgriSafe Network clinic (for locations, visit: agrisafe.org/locations/)

Additional safety regulations for respiratory protection may apply in employer/employee situations, including farms, grain elevators or feed mills. Contact the Iowa Occupational Safety and Health Consultation and Education program for more information at 515-281-7629.

***Cryptococcus gattii* infections on the rise in the Pacific Northwest**

Cryptococcus gattii, typically found in tropical and subtropical areas in the past, is now being seen in both humans and animals in the Pacific Northwest. In California, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, 60 infections were reported as of July 1st, 2010 and 15 people are known to have died.

Unlike more commonly-occurring *Cryptococcus neoformans* infections, *C. gattii* infections are found in non-HIV positive patients and may cause 70 to 80 percent

of cryptococcal infections in immunocompetent hosts. *C. gattii* is also more likely to result in tumor-like granulomatous lesions and these infections are less responsive to antifungal drugs.

The incubation period may be as long as 13 months, and infections can be asymptomatic or result in a wide range of symptoms including chest pain, cough, fever, headache, meningitis, nausea/vomiting, night sweats, shortness of breath or weight loss. The disease is primarily transmitted via the respiratory route, but is not communicable from person to person or animal to person.

Health care providers should consider *C. gattii* infection when cryptococcal infections are seen in immunocompetent patients, especially those who have been in the Pacific Northwest in the past 13 months. Please report any suspected cases to CADE (800) 362-2736.

**Meeting announcements and training opportunities
None at this time.**

We wish everyone a healthy week!

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