Epi Update for Friday, May 21, 2021

Office of the Public Health Medical Director
Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE)
Bureau of HIV, STD, and Hepatitis

Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH)

Items for this week's Epi Update include:

- **Resuming the Epi Update**
- **Ct values and COVID-19 testing**
- **Preventing COVID and other common diseases**
- **In the news: Don't kiss, snuggle backyard poultry, CDC warns in salmonella alert**
- **In the news: In a first, gut microbe genes linked to array of human diseases**
- **Infographic: COVID-19 – Prevent the spread**

Resuming the Epi Update

It has been over a year since our last Epi Update and we are pleased to be resuming this regular message. I would like to take the opportunity to say THANK YOU to all of Iowa's dedicated public health professionals as well as our healthcare providers, emergency managers, first responders and more who have remained flexible and resilient over the past year. I would also like to acknowledge the exceptional work of the IDPH epidemiologists in CADE, under the leadership of Dr. Ann Garvey, whose tireless expertise, resolve, and commitment have been especially critical during this response and recovery effort. Public health has truly faced a challenge unlike any other, but over the past year and half we have come a long way together and made some remarkable advances in how we approach disease prevention and control.

I am encouraged by the continued decrease in COVID-19 virus activity and the ever-increasing number of Iowans choosing to protect themselves and their loved ones by getting vaccinated. I am so grateful for the efforts everyone has made and I look forward to continuing to make progress not just on COVID-19, but all of the things we can do to protect and improve the health of Iowans!

Best,

Caitlin S. Pedati MD, MPH, FAAP
Medical Director & State Epidemiologist
Iowa Department of Public Health

Ct values and COVID-19 testing
Ct values are an output in PCR tests. It has been suggested that the Ct value can be used as an indicator of the amount of SARS-CoV-2 RNA present in the sample. However, attempting to link specific Ct values to particular amounts of RNA present can be misleading and erroneous. The Ct value does not alone directly correlate to a positive or negative result – it is only one portion of the analysis. Ct values are also impacted by the quality of the sample collected. A poorly collected sample may give a lower than actual Ct value.

Reporting Ct values is not currently a recommended practice or even considered useful by national testing standards. Notably, the Association of Public Health Laboratories, CDC, and the College of American Pathologists all state that Ct values should not be reported because of variations in sample collection and testing. Some manufacturers do not provide a Ct value, only the interpretation of the result. From the perspective of many clinical laboratory scientists, this approach to COVID-19 testing is preferable because it reduces the risk of human error and standardizes the interpretation of the data.

For more information, visit the links below from CDC, the Association of Public Health Laboratories, and the Infectious Disease Society of America:

- www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/faqs.html#Interpreting-Results-of-Diagnostic-Tests
- research.uiowa.edu/sites/research.uiowa.edu/files/aphl-covid19-ct-values.pdf
- research.uiowa.edu/sites/research.uiowa.edu/files/ct_value_cap_summary.pdf

Preventing COVID and other common diseases
As COVID-19 cases continue to decrease and people start to resume regular activities, IDPH is seeing an increase in once-common respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses. While it is normal to see enteric and certain respiratory illness at this time of year, the near absence of many diseases (e.g., influenza and norovirus) during the pandemic was likely due in part to the safer behaviors many of us practiced.

It is important to remember the same behaviors that helped to reduce COVID-19 transmission also work to prevent many other infections:

- Wash your hands after going to the bathroom, before preparing food, and before eating to reduce the risk of spread of a number of bacteria and viruses
- Stay home when you are sick to prevent spreading your illness to others
- Clean frequently touched surfaces that might be contaminated with germs
- Cover coughs and sneezes

IDPH understands the importance of social support and recreation to not only prevent illness, but to promote wellness. Please remember to resume these activities safely.

For information on how to prevent common diseases, visit idph.iowa.gov/cade.

In the news: Don't kiss, snuggle backyard poultry - CDC warns in salmonella alert
www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/don-t-kiss-or-snuggle-backyard-poultry-cdc-warns-salmonella-n1268083

In the news: In a first, gut microbe genes linked to array of human diseases
hms.harvard.edu/news/gut-check

Infographic: COVID-19 – Prevent the spread

To view in full size, visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/images/social/covid19-prevention-fb.png?noicon.

Have a healthy and happy week!

Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology
800-362-2736

Bureau of HIV, STD, and Hepatitis
515-281-6801