

EPI Update for Friday September 1, 2006

Center For Acute Disease Epidemiology

Iowa Department of Public Health

Items for this week's EPI Update include:

- **September is Food Safety Month**
- **Help wanted: influenza surveillance sentinel healthcare providers**
- **Tick talk: summer is waning, but ticks still a risk**
- **West Nile virus: September is peak season**
- **Announcements and training opportunities**

September is Food Safety Month

September 2006 marks the 12th annual National Food Safety Education Month. The theme for this year is *Don't Compromise – Clean and Sanitize*. During the month of September the IDPH Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE) and the Office of Technical Assistance, Division of Environmental Health will be providing, in each issue of the EPI Updates, tips on educating the public on steps they can use to handle and prepare food safely.

The first step to preparing food safely is to clean hands and surfaces often. Pathogens that cause food-borne illness can be found on hands and surfaces such as utensils, countertops, cutting boards and food. To stop the spread of pathogens and prevent food-borne illnesses follow these important guidelines:

1. Clean your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
2. Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you prepare the next food.
3. Use paper towels to clean kitchen surfaces. If you do use cloth towels make sure that they are washed regularly in hot water in a clothes washing machine. If a sponge is used to clean surfaces, microwave it at the end of the day for 30 seconds or put it in the dishwasher.
4. Rinse all fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water. Rub firm-skin fruits and vegetables with your hands or scrub them with a clean vegetable brush while rinsing.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/op/_resources/OOP%20Brochure%2012.20.05.pdf

For more information on National Food Safety Education Month visit www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/september.html

Help wanted: Influenza sentinel provider healthcare surveillance

IDPH and the University Hygienic Laboratory (UHL) are currently recruiting healthcare providers to participate in the 2005-06 Iowa Influenza Sentinel Provider Surveillance Network. Data from sentinel providers is *absolutely critical* for monitoring the impact of influenza and, in combination with other influenza surveillance data, can be used to guide prevention and control activities, treatment guidelines, vaccine strain selection and other aspects of patient care.

What is required to be a sentinel healthcare provider?

Sentinel providers are asked to do the following:

- Track total number of patients seen each week
- Track the number of patients with influenza-like illness
- Collect specimens from some patients and submit to UHL
- Report data weekly in a web-based reporting system

What are the program incentives?

- Free testing supplies from UHL (does not include rapid test kits)
- Free influenza testing: virus isolation and strain sub-typing done at UHL
- Access to rapid, online test results
- Free subscriptions to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) and Emerging Infectious Diseases journals
- Weekly Iowa surveillance reports

How do you sign up to be sentinel healthcare provider?

Providers of any specialty (e.g., family practice, internal medicine, pediatrics) in any type of practice *where influenza is commonly seen* (e.g., private practice, public health clinic, emergency room, university student health center) are eligible to participate. If interested contact Meghan Harris at IDPH at 515-281-7134 or mharris@idph.state.ia.us.

Tick talk: summer is waning, but ticks still a risk

As fall approaches and folks are hiking, camping, and landscaping their yards, it is important to remember that these activities may result in exposure to ticks. So remember to follow these simple prevention and protection measures when in high-risk environments:

- Wear light-colored clothing – this increases your chances of seeing any ticks that are crawling on your clothing.
- Tuck your pant legs into your socks so ticks cannot crawl up the inside of your pants.

- Apply insect repellent with DEET to discourage tick attachment. Repellents containing permethrin can be sprayed on boots and clothing, and will last for several days. Repellents containing DEET can be applied to the skin, but will last only a few hours before reapplication is necessary. (Use DEET with caution on young children since application of large amounts of DEET on young children has been associated with adverse reactions and should not be used at all on children under 2 months old.) Other insect repellants, such as picaridin and oil of lemon eucalyptus, have not been shown to be effective against ticks.
- Perform daily tick checks. Check your body for ticks at least once every 24 hours if you are in a “tick-friendly” environment. Use a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all parts of your body. Remove any ticks you find.
- Parents should check their children for ticks, especially in the hair. Ticks may also be carried into the household on clothing and pets, and attach later, so check clothing and pets carefully.

More information on ticks and the diseases they can carry is available at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/ticktips2005/>

West Nile virus: September is peak season

As the unofficial end of the summer approaches, it’s important that Iowans realize their risk for contracting West Nile virus doesn’t decrease because summer is over. In fact, the number of mosquitoes carrying West Nile virus peaks during the month of September.

Iowans should take the following steps to reduce the risk of exposure to West Nile virus:

- Use insect repellent with DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus. (All three are shown to be effective against mosquitoes.) Always read the repellent label and consult with a health care provider if you have questions when using these types of products for children. For example, oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under 3 years-old. Use the lowest concentration of DEET, depending on the activity, when using on young children.
- Avoid outdoor activities at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, pants, shoes, and socks whenever possible outdoors.
- Eliminate standing water around the home because that’s where mosquitoes breed. Empty water from buckets, cans, pool covers and pet water dishes. Change water in bird baths every three to four days to interrupt the mosquitoes’ life cycle.

Currently, West Nile virus activity is present in 33 counties and includes 9 human cases and zero deaths. The human cases were confirmed in Carroll, Emmet, Hardin, Kossuth, O’Brien, Marion and Plymouth counties. Since the emergence of West Nile virus in the state in 2001, there have been 270 confirmed human cases and 12 deaths.

IDPH has a toll-free hotline for Iowans to receive WNV information. The number is 866-WNV-Iowa (1-866-968-4692). Information is also available on IDPH's Web site, www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/wnv_surveillance.asp

Meeting announcements and training opportunities

- **Immunization Update – September 13, 2006 via an ICN location near you –**
 - Session 1: 12:00-1:30 PM
 - The first session will be held from 12:00-1:30 p.m. and will focus on vaccine storage and handling; administration and current recommendations; and new vaccines. This educational opportunity is open to all providers with VFC providers specifically encouraged to attend.
 - Session 2: 1:30 – 2:45 PM
 - The second session will be held from 1:30-2:45 and will provide information regarding 2006-2007 child care and school audits (including changes made to Iowa Administrative Code 641, Chapter 7). Topics in Session 2 will include additional doses of required vaccines, provisional enrollment period, minimum age and intervals, four-day grace period, and changes to the Certificate of Immunization. Local public health agency staff who conduct school and child care audits should attend this session.

This is a free education opportunity – more information available at: www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/immunization.asp

- **2nd Annual University Hygienic Laboratory Invitational – 3:00 – 7:00 PM (Dinner Included)**
 - Region 1 October 18, 2006 DMACC - Ankeny
 - Region 2 October 10, 2006 Holiday Inn – Mason City
 - Region 3 October 3, 2006 West Iowa Tech - Cherokee
 - Region 4 October 17, 2006 Iowa Western CC - Atlantic
 - Region 5 October 30, 2006 Indian Hills - Ottumwa
 - Region 6 October 19, 2006 Wickiup Learning Cntr. – Toddville

Watch for more details at www.uhl.uiowa.edu/.

Have a great Labor Day weekend!
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