

Epi Update for Friday, November 18, 2022

CENTER FOR ACUTE DISEASE EPIDEMIOLOGY (CADE)
BUREAU OF HIV, STD, AND HEPATITIS

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Items for this week's Epi Update include:

- **Early and increased respiratory virus activity, especially among youth**
- **Everyday disease prevention**
- **Be Antibiotics Aware: Protect your patient**
- **Monitoring, maintaining dental waterlines to prevent infections – SHL can help!**
- **Measles: Cases in the U.S., stay vigilant**
- **Cooking for large groups**

Early and increased respiratory virus activity, especially among youth

CDC has released a Health Advisory about early and elevated respiratory disease activity caused by multiple viruses, especially among children, and placing a strain on health care systems. Iowa has limited data by age group for influenza and RSV hospitalizations which indicate early and increased respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and influenza activity across age groups. The percent of positive RSV tests reported on the Iowa respiratory survey is currently 23.5%, which is the highest value at this point in the season since 2016. The percent of influenza positive tests has recently begun increasing, and is also the highest value at this point in the season since 2016.

RSV and influenza seasonality have been unpredictable since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. RSV activity started several months early in the summer of 2021 and activity is increasing earlier than normal this year. Influenza activity was historically low during the 2020-21 season and extended later into the spring than typical seasons. Nationally, RSV hospitalization rates are elevated, and influenza hospitalization among all ages is currently the highest it has been at this point in the season in over 10 years. COVID-19 hospitalizations have decreased among all age groups since August 2022, but are expected to increase during the upcoming winter and spring.

Along with educating patients about respiratory disease prevention, health care providers can take the following steps to reduce respiratory virus transmission in their communities:

- Recommend and offer influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations for eligible persons 6 months and older.
- Consider testing patients with suspected respiratory virus infections for influenza, RSV, and COVID-19 and other circulating viruses, especially among those with serious illness or risk factors.
- Prescribe antivirals for influenza, COVID-19, and RSV for treatment and prophylaxis, as recommended (e.g., palivizumab to prevent RSV-associated hospitalizations among high-risk children).

For more information visit <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2022/han00479.asp>.

Everyday disease prevention

Many of the most common infectious diseases tend to peak during the fall and winter months. COVID-19 continues to spread, influenza season is beginning, and RSV activity is increasing nationwide and in Iowa. Norovirus, the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in the U.S, also peaks in colder months.

Thankfully, there are several actions everyone can take every day to help prevent many of these diseases at once! Important examples include:

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Clean high touch surfaces in your home frequently with household disinfectants.

- Practice hand hygiene frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or hand sanitizer.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or upper shirt sleeve, not a hand.
- Avoid gatherings if you or your children are ill.
- Keep children home from daycare or school who have fever, especially with a cough, difficulty breathing, or shortness of breath, congestion, runny nose, or sore throat, until they are fever-free for 24 hours without medications that reduce fever.
- Stay up to date on disease trends via the *Epi Update* and the *Iowa Respiratory Virus Surveillance Report*.

Staying up to date on your vaccines – both a yearly influenza vaccine and an updated COVID-19 vaccine – is the best way to make sure you and your family are protected. These vaccines are safe and effective, lower the risk of illness, and protect against severe complications. There are no vaccines available to prevent RSV, although multiple products are in late stages of clinical development. RSV prevention primarily means practicing basic hygiene.

Iowans should not visit the Emergency Department for cold and flu symptoms, sore throats, ear infections, minor burns or injuries, sprains and strains, rash, or other skin irritations. Contact your pediatrician or health care provider if you or a loved one needs medical care. Your provider can offer advice on whether your child needs to be evaluated in person, tested for COVID-19 or influenza, and the best location for care.

As a reminder, antibiotics will not treat colds, influenza, most sore throats, bronchitis, and many sinus and ear infections. Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem in the U.S., and the main cause is the misuse of antibiotics. Antibiotics will cure bacterial infections, such as strep throat, urinary tract infections, or whooping cough – but not the viruses on the rise right now.

To find a vaccine provider, visit www.vaccines.gov.

For full disease-specific prevention guidelines, infectious disease data/reports, and more, visit idph.iowa.gov/cade.

Be Antibiotics Aware: Protect your patient

CDC is urging health care professionals to prescribe antibiotics only when necessary to help fight antimicrobial resistance and the spread of superbugs and to protect patients from antibiotic-related adverse drug events. During U.S. Antibiotic Awareness Week and throughout the year, CDC promotes *Be Antibiotics Aware*, an educational effort to raise awareness about the importance of safe antibiotic prescribing and use.

Be Antibiotics Aware encourages healthcare professionals to:

- Only prescribe antibiotics when they are clinically indicated. Antibiotics are only needed to treat certain infections caused by bacteria, not viruses like those that cause COVID-19. You can do harm by prescribing antibiotics when they are not needed.
- Follow clinical guidelines on how best to evaluate and treat infections.
- Optimize the use of diagnostic tests to improve treatment of conditions like sepsis and stop the spread of infections, including COVID-19.
- Always prescribe the right antibiotic, at the right dose, for the right duration, and at the right time.
 - Using the shortest effective duration of antibiotic therapy is a key antibiotic stewardship strategy. The goal is to optimize the treatment of the infection while minimizing the risks of side effects from antibiotics and antimicrobial resistance.
- Talk to patients about why they don't need antibiotics for a viral respiratory infection, what to do to feel better, and when to seek care again if they don't feel better.
- Talk to patients and their families about possible harms from antibiotics, such as allergic reactions, *C. difficile*, and antimicrobial-resistant infections.
- Educate patients and their families to recognize the signs and symptoms of worsening infection and sepsis, and to know when to seek medical care.

- If sepsis is suspected, gather patient information and immediately communicate it to hospital health care professionals. Antibiotics should be started as soon as possible when sepsis is suspected.

For more information about *Be Antibiotics Aware*, visit: www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/index.html.

Also look for messaging on Iowa HHS social media over the next week by searching for #IAGermDrugAware22.

Monitoring, maintaining dental waterlines to prevent infections – SHL can help!

CDC has released a Health Advisory to emphasize the importance of following existing recommendations for maintaining and monitoring dental waterlines. Outbreaks of nontuberculous Mycobacteria (NTM) infections have occurred in children who received pulpotomies in pediatric dental clinics where dental treatment water contained high levels of bacteria. CDC provides guidelines on infection control in dental settings to treat dental unit waterlines and monitor water quality. Dental providers should be familiar with these recommendations on how to properly maintain and monitor dental equipment to ensure that dental treatment water is safe for patient care.

CDC recommends testing periodically for the overall bacterial quality of water via a Heterotrophic Plate Count. SHL routinely performs this test and can aid in setting up a bacterial monitoring program for dental waterlines. SHL will provide collection bottles, cooler, and instructions. Collection kit bottle orders may be placed by contacting SHL Client Services at 319-335-4500. For technical questions, please contact Ryan Jepson at ryan-jepson@uiowa.edu or call 319-335-4269.

To view the full Health Advisory, including detailed guidelines, visit emergency.cdc.gov/han/2022/han00478.asp.

Measles: Cases in the U.S., stay vigilant

So far this year, 51 measles cases have been identified in the U.S., up from 49 cases identified in 2021. No cases of measles have been identified in Iowa this year, but Iowa HHS, SHL, and local public health partners do periodically consult on patients who are suspected of having measles and, if appropriate, can facilitate testing. Health care providers are urged to remain vigilant for patients experiencing symptoms of measles (fever and rash with cough, runny nose, or conjunctivitis), especially if they are unvaccinated or have had a known exposure.

Health care providers who suspect a patient may have measles should contact Iowa HHS immediately at 515-242-5935 during business hours or 515-323-4360 outside business hours.

For more information about measles, visit www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html.

Cooking for large groups

Preparing food for large groups can be a risk factor for the spread of enteric illnesses, such as *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, and more. Untrained food handlers might not be familiar with important food safety considerations that apply to cooking large amounts of food. USDA and FSIS have guidelines to help volunteers prepare and serve food safely for large groups, such as family reunions, church dinners, and community gatherings, many of which take place during the holiday season.

Cooking For Large Groups: A Volunteer's Guide To Food Safety can be found at www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/cooking-groups.

Have a healthy and happy week!

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Note: Due to the holiday, there will be no Epi Update released on Friday, November 25.