**Epi Update for Monday, February 26 2024**

cENTER FOR acute disease epidemiology (cade)

bureau of hiv, stI, and hEPATITIS

Iowa department of health and human services

Items for this week’s Epi Update include

* Increased disease activity in schools: Protect yourself and those around you
* Cryptosporidiosis risk factors, prevention
* Tuberculosis resources
* Meeting announcements and training opportunities

Increased disease activity in schools: Protect yourself and those around you

For the last several weeks, Iowa HHS has received increased reports of disease activity in schools. Student absenteeism due to illness is tracked in the weekly *Iowa Respiratory Virus Surveillance Report* in two different ways:

* All Iowa K-12 schools are asked to report days where absenteeism due to illness is at least 10% of enrollment.
* A subset of Iowa schools voluntarily report absenteeism due to illness weekly, regardless of what percentage of students are absent.

Weekly school illness absenteeism rates have increased since mid-January. In addition, the number of schools reporting at least 10 percent absenteeism due to illness increased from three schools in mid-January to 60 schools reported on last week’s *Iowa Respiratory Virus Surveillance Report*. The number dropped slightly to 52 schools on this week’s report.

These school illness reporting systems track all types of illness, including both respiratory and enteric. Cough, sore throat, fever, and headache have been the most common symptoms noted in the last two weeks, but enteric symptoms such as vomiting and nausea were also frequently reported.

There are steps everyone can take to help prevent many of the illnesses circulating in the community:

* Stay home if you are ill. Avoid close contact such as kissing, hugging, and sharing cups or eating utensils with people who are sick, and when you are sick.
* Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before eating or preparing food and after using the bathroom. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water is not readily available.
* Clean frequently touched surfaces in schools, homes, and workplaces to reduce the spread of germs. It's crucial to utilize cleaning agents that are proven to be effective against the specific germs of concern and use cleaning products as directed.
* Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your upper shirt sleeve, not your hands.

To view the *Iowa Respiratory Virus Surveillance Report*, visit

[hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/center-acute-disease-epidemiology/flu-report](https://hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/center-acute-disease-epidemiology/flu-report).

Cryptosporidiosis risk factors, prevention

Cryptosporidiosis (commonly known as crypto) is a diarrheal illness caused by the parasite *Cryptosporidium*. Found in stool, the parasite can be spread directly from person to person and via contaminated water or surfaces. *Cryptosporidium* can also be shed in the feces of cows/calves and other animals. While most healthy adults experience mild symptoms, people with weakened immune systems may develop serious, chronic, and sometimes fatal illness.

There are several ways to prevent crypto infection:

* Wash your hands frequently, especially after using the restroom, before preparing or eating food, and after interacting with animals. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not effective against *Cryptosporidium*.
* Stay home from school or work while you are sick with diarrhea.
* Do not swim with diarrhea. Do not swim for two weeks after recovery if you are diagnosed with crypto.
* Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, ponds, etc.

For more information about crypto, visit [www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/).

Tuberculosis resources

The Iowa HHS Tuberculosis (TB) Program recently highlighted important TB resources for health care providers and public health professionals:

* CDC TB Elimination Homepage: [www.cdc.gov/tb/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tb/default.htm).

This page is the main resource for TB educational and professional resources. Health care workers are encouraged to make this a critical first stop when looking for TB information.

* CDC TB Publications and Products: [www.cdc.gov/tb/publications/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tb/publications/default.htm).

This is the site to find a wide range of materials to print, share, and download. There is also an option to order materials directly from the TB Division.

* CDC TB Tools for Health Care Providers: [www.cdc.gov/tb/education/provider\_edmaterials.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tb/education/provider_edmaterials.htm).

This page features continuing education activities for health care providers, among other resources.

Contact the Iowa HHS TB Program at 515-281-7504 or 515-281-8636 with any questions.

For more information about TB in Iowa, visit [hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/tb](https://hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/tb).

Meeting announcements and training opportunities

The *Iowa’s Governor's Conference on Substance Use, Prevention, Treatment and Recovery* will take place virtually on April 23 - 25. The purpose of this conference is to establish a meaningful dialogue among health professionals by focusing on trending topics, best practices, and strategies for addressing barriers in behavioral health. The conference will provide education to enhance the knowledge of the behavioral health workforce, develop strength within each system discipline, and increase collaboration between system partners for coordinated response to substance use and problem gambling. For more information and to register, visit [www.regcytes.extension.iastate.edu/gcsa/](http://www.regcytes.extension.iastate.edu/gcsa/).

Have a healthy and happy week!

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