

Epi Update for Friday, April 18, 2025

CENTER FOR ACUTE DISEASE EPIDEMIOLOGY (CADE)

Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (Iowa HHS)

Items for this week's Epi Update include

- Hansen's disease overview
- Lab Week 2025 – Thank you, laboratory professionals!
- Sun safety
- Infographic: It's easy to protect yourself from UV exposure

Hansen's disease overview

Hansen's disease (leprosy) is caused by slow-growing *Mycobacterium* that can affect the nerves, skin, eyes, and nose. About 95% of people are immune to Hansen's disease. It takes prolonged, close contact with someone with untreated Hansen's disease over many months to spread from person to person.

The bacteria grow very slowly, and it can take up to 20 years to develop symptoms following infection. Symptoms often present as discolored or thickened skin patches or nodules that may lose sensation and cause pain/burning around the impacted area. If untreated, Hansen's disease can result in nerve damage that may cause muscle weakness or paralysis (often in the hands or feet), blindness, or disfigurement. Those infected often experience social isolation and discrimination.

Hansen's disease is treatable with a combination of antibiotics, which vary depending on the clinical presentation. Treatment can last up to two years, but individuals are no longer considered infectious once treatment begins.

In the U.S, Hansen's disease is rare, with about 200 cases reported each year. Hansen's disease is reportable in Iowa, and generally 0-3 cases are reported each year in Iowa.

Local public health partners follow-up on each Hansen's disease report and ensure that physicians are connected with the National Hansen's Disease Program in Baton Rouge, LA. They offer comprehensive guides for disease management, physician consult, treatment referrals, and more.

For more information about Hansen's Disease, visit www.cdc.gov/leprosy/hcp/clinical-overview/index.html.

For more information about the National Hansen's Disease Program, visit www.hrsa.gov/hansens-disease.

Lab Week 2025 – Thank you, laboratory professionals!

April 20 - 26 is Lab Week 2025, celebrating medical laboratory professionals and pathologists. Diagnostic testing is not only critical for patient care, but is a key method by which reportable diseases in Iowa are identified, allowing for public health follow-up.

Iowa HHS would like to thank staff at Iowa's State Hygienic Laboratory (SHL) for all the crucial work they do to aid public health response in Iowa.

For more about Lab Week 2025, visit www.ascp.org/membership-resources/events-activities/lab-week.

Sun safety

Ultraviolet (UV) light levels in Iowa are already consistently reaching 6-7 (high) on the UV Index Scale. CDC recommends skin protection if the UV Index is 3 or higher. UV rays tend to be strongest from 10 AM - 4 PM. UV rays can damage skin cells, and most skin cancers are caused by too much exposure to UV light.

Those older than six months should use a broad-spectrum sunscreen on exposed skin that filters both UVA and UVB rays, with a sun-protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. Re-apply every two hours or after swimming, sweating, or toweling off. Sunscreen is not recommended for babies 6 months and younger, so be sure to keep them out of the sun as much as possible.

More outdoor tips to limit UV exposure include:

- Stick to the shade! Use an umbrella, tree, or other shelter to stay out of direct sunlight.
- When possible, wear long-sleeved shirts and pants or clothing certified to offer UV protection.
- Wear a hat with a brim that shades your face, ears, and neck.
- Sunglasses protect your eyes from UV rays and reduce the risk of cataracts.

For more sun safety tips, visit www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/sun-safety/index.html.

Infographic: It's easy to protect yourself from UV exposure



To view in full size, visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/images/sun-safety-sunscreen.jpg.

Have a healthy and happy week!
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