

EPI Update for Friday, September 18, 2009
Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE)
Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH)

Items for this week's EPI Update include:

- **September is National Food Safety Education Month**
- **Erythromycin (0.5%) ophthalmic ointment shortage**
- **Weekly novel influenza A (H1N1) update**
- **Meeting announcements and training opportunities**

September is National Food Safety Education Month

September 2009 marks the 15th annual National Food Safety Education Month. The theme for this year is Myth-busters: Dishing up Food Safety Fact from Fiction. Unsafe food handling risks at home are more common than most people think. The four easy lessons of 1) Clean, 2) Separate, 3) Cook and 4) Chill can help prevent harmful bacteria from making your family sick.

The first step to preparing food safely is to CLEAN hands and surfaces often. Bacteria and viruses can be spread throughout the kitchen and get on hands, cutting boards, knives and countertops. Frequent cleaning can keep that from happening. To stop the spread of disease-causing organisms and prevent food-borne illnesses, follow these important guidelines:

- Wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds before and after handling food.
- Run cutting boards and utensils through the dishwasher or wash them in hot soapy water after each use.
- Keep countertops clean by washing with hot soapy water after preparing food.

For more information visit www.foodsafety.gov/news/index.html

Erythromycin (0.5%) ophthalmic ointment shortage

The IDPH has recently received reports of a shortage of erythromycin (0.5 percent) ophthalmic ointment. Erythromycin ophthalmic ointment is the recommended prophylaxis for ophthalmia neonatorum by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Ophthalmia neonatorum is caused by undetected chlamydial or gonococcal infection in the mother of the newborn.

Iowa Code Section 139A.38 states:

“A physician attending the birth of a child shall cause to be instilled into the eyes of the newly born infant a prophylactic solution approved by the department. This section shall not be construed to require treatment of the infant's eyes with a prophylactic solution if the infant's parent or legal guardian states that such treatment conflicts with the tenets and practices of a recognized religious denomination of which the parent or legal guardian is an adherent or member.”

Tetracycline ophthalmic ointment (1 percent) is also recommended for prophylaxis for ophthalmia neonatorum, but the ointment is no longer marketed in the United States. Also, silver nitrate (1 percent) which was a recommended regimen in the 2002 STD Treatment Guidelines is not available in the United States at this time either.

Therefore, because of the shortage of erythromycin (0.5 percent) ophthalmic ointment, CDC has created a new Web page with updated guidance and recommendations for dealing with the shortage of the ointment. It is important to share this information broadly to providers, and other practitioners across Iowa. CDC will use this Web page for any future updates on this issue; always visit www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2006/erythromycinOintmentShortage.htm .

Weekly novel influenza A (H1N1) update

(This new reoccurring section will appear in each issue of the Friday Update)

Novel Influenza A (H1N1) activity is steadily increasing in Iowa and throughout the country. Several states are reporting increases in illness and outbreaks in school-age populations. The majority of influenza-like illness in Iowa is occurring in persons ages 5 to 24 years. Laboratory data indicates that nearly all influenza-like illnesses in Iowa are due to the novel H1N1 influenza virus.

Materials on the IDPH Web site are constantly updated. Please review both the seasonal and Novel H1N1 data at www.idph.state.ia.us. Also, the weekly surveillance report continues to be posted weekly, on Fridays, at www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/iisn.asp .

Meeting announcements and training opportunities

None

Have a healthy and happy week!

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