

EPI Update for Friday, April 9, 2010

Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology

Iowa Department of Public Health

Items for this week's EPI Update include:

- ✍ **Norovirus activity continues in Iowa**
- ✍ **How to start outdoor grilling safely**
- ✍ **Disease risks of gardening**
- ✍ **Meeting announcements and training opportunities**

Norovirus activity continues in Iowa

Noroviruses are one of the most common causes of viral gastroenteritis in both Iowa and the United States. Almost weekly, IDPH receives reports of norovirus illnesses and outbreaks across the state. Nationally, norovirus concerns have stopped cruise ships from sailing, closed restaurants and put long term care facilities under quarantine.

Symptoms of norovirus illness are not specific and include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramping, with occasional low-grade fevers, chills, headaches, muscle aches, and fatigue. Symptoms typically last only one or two days. The most serious health problem is dehydration, which rarely requires hospitalization.

Noroviruses are usually spread by people failing to wash their hands after going to the bathroom or before preparing food, or preparing food while vomiting or having diarrhea. Obviously, anyone who is ill with diarrhea or vomiting should not touch anyone else's food; additionally, they should not provide care for the elderly, those seeking healthcare, or children. Since norovirus can be spread prior to the person coming down with symptoms, good hand hygiene at all times by everyone is essential!

- ? Hand washing with warm water and soap is effective against noroviruses. See www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/common/pdf/abx/tab2_handwashing.pdf
- ? Alcohol-based hand gels may not kill norovirus, thus hand washing is much preferred.

Surfaces contaminated with vomitus/feces should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected immediately using a bleach-based household cleaner. It is important to immediately remove and wash any clothing or linens that may be contaminated with virus (use hot water and soap).

For more information about norovirus, visit either

www.idph.state.ia.us/idph_universalhelp/main.aspx?system=IdphEpiManual&context=Norovirus_factsheet or www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus.htm

How to start outdoor grilling safely

Spring is upon us, and the outdoor grilling season will soon be in full swing. To ensure the safety of grillers:

- ? Check the gas lines and valves on gas grills to make sure there are no cracks, holes or blockages.
- ? If you suspect a gas leak, don't use the grill until the problem is fixed.
- ? Store liquid petroleum (LP) tanks in a secure, upright position and don't store extra full containers under the grill.
- ? Keep the grill on level ground at least ten feet away from a building, shrubs or anything that could catch fire.

- ? Never operate gas or charcoal grills in enclosed areas such as garages, campers or tents (risk of carbon monoxide poisoning).
- ? When using charcoal, follow the directions on the charcoal bags and be sure charcoal is completely extinguished before discarding.
- ? Follow manufacturer's directions for using gas grills.
- ? Don't leave grills unattended. To prevent burns, keep children and pets away from grills.

Disease risks of gardening

For many, gardening can be a great way to enjoy the outdoors, beautify the community, and grow nourishing fruits and vegetables. But be aware of diseases associated with gardening: toxoplasmosis, tetanus, and sporotrichosis.

- ? Toxoplasmosis is caused by the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii* which can be found in cat feces. It typically causes serious health problems in pregnant women and people who are immune compromised. Exposure can occur by accidentally ingesting soil contaminated with feces (e.g., not washing hands after gardening or eating unwashed fruits or vegetables from a garden). To reduce the risk of toxoplasmosis:
 - ✍ Wear gloves when gardening and other activities that involve contact with soil or sand.
 - ✍ Wash hands thoroughly after gardening or having contact with soil or sand.
 - ✍ Peel and/or wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.
 - ✍ Wash cutting boards, dishes, counters, utensils, and hands with hot, soapy water after contact with unwashed fruits or vegetables.
- ? Tetanus typically occurs when a skin wound (especially puncture wounds) becomes contaminated by soil containing *Clostridium tetani*. Tetanus is vaccine preventable; however, it is estimated only about 50 percent of adult lowans are up-to-date with tetanus immunizations. The highest risk people are older women who may never have received the original tetanus series (older men typically received these vaccines during military service).
- ? Sporotrichosis, also known as "rose gardener's disease," is caused by the fungus *Sporothrix schenckii*, which is commonly found on vegetation and in the environment. Infection occurs when the fungus is introduced through a cut or puncture in the skin (i.e. rose thorns) while handling vegetation, rosebushes, briars, or mulch-rich dirt. Prevent this disease by wearing long sleeve shirts and gloves while gardening.

Meeting announcements and training opportunities

None

Have a healthy and happy week (and sunny but not too warm)!

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