

EPI Update for Friday, May 17, 2013
Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE)
Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH)

Items for this week's EPI Update include:

- **Novel coronavirus update**
- **Proper specimen storage for rabies samples**
- **National recreational water illness and injury prevention**
- **Microcystin poisoning continues designation as a reportable disease**
- **Meeting announcements and training opportunities**

Novel coronavirus update

As of May 14, there have been 38 lab confirmed cases of novel coronavirus worldwide. The majority of cases have occurred in Saudi Arabia, but cases have also occurred in Qatar, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and France. Twenty cases have been fatal. To date, there have been no cases in the United States and CDC has not issued any travel health warnings related to the virus.

Limited human-to-human transmission has occurred, possibly via droplet or contact transmission. The source of the virus remains under investigation, but genetic analysis has shown the virus to be closely related to coronaviruses found in bats. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/ncv/index.html.

Proper specimen storage for rabies samples

Rabies is a deadly virus that can be transmitted to people through saliva or neural tissue from infected animals. In Iowa, skunks and bats are the animals most commonly found to be rabid. SHL is the designated public health laboratory in Iowa and the lab provides free testing for potentially rabid animals that have exposed humans (please do not submit road kill!). Iowa State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory also tests animals for rabies.

In recent weeks, IDPH has consulted on a number of human rabies exposures where the specimen was improperly stored prior to submission. Inadequate storage and/or timely transportation may cause the specimen to be untestable, resulting in the need to receive rabies shots – perhaps unnecessarily. Thus, it is important to properly handle and store specimens and animals that need to be tested. Basic guidelines include the following:

- If the specimen will not be submitted for testing immediately, it should be refrigerated until transported or shipped.
- **DO NOT FREEZE THE SPECIMEN!**
- Double bag the specimen and place in a hard-sided container, such as a Styrofoam cooler.
- During transport, place ice packs around the bagged specimen to keep it cool.

It is important to note that the specimen containers will NOT be returned to the owner and those submitting specimens should plan accordingly. (Recently, a bat was submitted in an antique glass jar the submitter had planned to make into a lamp.)

For complete instructions on submitting a specimen for rabies testing, visit SHL's website at www.shl.uiowa.edu/kitsquotesforms/rabiescollectioninstructions.pdf.

National recreational water illness and injury prevention

There are 1,250 recreational water (which includes swimming pools and spas) locations in Iowa that are inspected by local health departments and IDPH. But the public needs to help keep these facilities healthy with responsible behavior in and around the pools. For more information on healthy swimming in both recreational water and natural waterways, visit www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/rwi-prevention-week/index.html.

Microcystin poisoning continues designation as a reportable disease

This is the fifth year the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) director has designated suspected or confirmed cases of exposure to microcystin (a toxin produced by blue-green algae) a reportable disease in Iowa to study its occurrence and epidemiology in Iowa. This designation is in place until October 31, 2013.

IDPH is encouraging health care providers to be on the alert for potential cases of microcystin poisoning, especially during the later summer months when elevated levels historically have occurred. Diagnosis of microcystin poisoning is based on symptoms and a history of exposure to a body of water. Exposure to blue-green algae can occur either by swallowing water, by having direct skin contact as when swimming or wading, or by breathing airborne droplets containing microcystin, such as during boating or waterskiing.

Symptoms of microcystin poisoning may take hours or days to show up, but normally are exhibited within one week after exposure. Symptoms may include stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headaches and fever; rash, hives, or skin blisters, especially on the lips or under swimsuits; watery eyes and nose, cough and sore throat, pleuritic pain, wheezing, and allergic reactions; and liver damage evidenced by an elevated SGGT (serum gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase) after exposure to large amounts of microcystin. Treatment of microcystin poisoning is supportive. To report a suspected case of microcystin poisoning, call 1-800-972-2026 during regular business hours. For questions regarding the microcystin poisoning surveillance program, please contact the Division of Environmental Health with questions or concerns at 515-281-8707 or 515-281-8158.

Meeting announcements and training opportunities

None

We wish everyone a happy and healthy week!

Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology

Iowa Department of Public Health

800-362-2736