

FOCUS

On Preparedness

Cherokee County Health Department

Coordinator's Corner

By: Rhonda Jones

As the saying goes, change is inevitable. CCHD's Public Health Preparedness (PHP) Coordinator, Julie Levett, has recently returned to her chosen field of respiratory therapy.

Julie was a part of the PHP team for nearly two years. She personally spearheaded the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Campaign for Cherokee County. Julie met

with dozens of local businesses, providing them with information about pan flu and how to prepare their business continuity plans. She was also instrumental in several large PHP projects including a mass mail-out of pan flu information, creating the website www.cherokeeflu.com and organizing 2007's "Preparing for Pandemic Influenza Conference". Julie led the PHP team as coordinator

since August 2007. She will truly be missed at CCHD.

Good Luck,
Julie!
We'll Miss You.

Also speaking of changes, you will notice this is a shortened version of our

usual newsletter. In the past "Focus on Preparedness" has been a project of the PHP staff only. CCHD is in the process of expanding the newsletter to include information and articles from more programs at the health department. This transition will take place in November and the name of the newsletter will change to "Focus on Public Health." As always, your feedback is welcomed.

Tips for Staying Healthy This School Year

Handy Hints For Preparedness

- For help developing your personal/family preparedness plan, visit www.texasprepares.com
- Share your knowledge about preparedness with others.
- Include your pets in your preparedness plan.
- Keep a good supply of non-prescription drugs on hand such as: fever reducers, cold and flu medications, stomach remedies and ointments.

As summer races by, parents, students, and school faculty and staff are busy preparing for the beginning of the next school year. Not only will our children be going back to school, but so will millions of germs. It's no secret that school children bring home many colds, flu and viruses. The time seems appropriate to review some healthy practices that can help us all stay well.

- **Wash your hands** after using the restroom, before handling or eating food, after coughing or sneezing on hands, when hands are dirty, and frequently throughout the day. Teach children to use soap and warm water to wash hands, lathering up for at least 20 seconds, or the time it takes to sing the "Happy

Birthday" song.

- **Use hand sanitizers.** It's not always convenient to wash your hands, so alcohol based sanitizers can help fill the gaps when you can't get to soap and water. Be sure to monitor young children's use of hand sanitizers.
- **Refrain from touching your eyes, mouth and nose.** Germs that comes in contact with mucous membranes in the eyes, nose, and mouth can cause infections.
- **Don't cover your coughs and sneezes with your hand.** Use a tissue or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. This keeps germs from getting on your hands and being spread.

- **Don't Smoke.** Statistics show that heavy smokers get more severe colds and more frequent ones.
- **Stay well hydrated** by drinking plenty of water or other fluids.
- **Maintain your general health** by getting plenty of rest, good nutrition and exercising.
- **Keep children home from school when they are sick.** Medicating children may relieve symptoms temporarily, but it does not stop their illnesses from being contagious to others.



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On-line Resources

- www.cchdtexas.org
- www.dshs.state.tx.us
- www.cdc.gov
- www.texasprepares.org

Public Health Preparedness Team

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Sanitarian

Disease 101: Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF) is an illness that occurs when a tick infected with the bacterial organism *Rickettsia rickettsii* bites a human. Several types of ticks including the American dog tick, the brown dog tick and the Rocky Mountain wood tick can transmit RMSF. The incubation period is 5-10 days after the bite.

Early symptoms of RMSF are often non-specific and can include fever, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain, lack of appetite and severe headache. Later symptoms are a rash, abdominal pain, joint pain and diarrhea. The three symptoms that are most indicative of RMSF are the rash, fever and a previous tick bite. RMSF is diagnosed based on a combination of clinical symptoms and specialized laboratory test results. RMSF can be treated with antibiotics, but many patients require hospitalization because it can be a severe illness.

Limiting exposure to ticks

reduces the likelihood of infection with RMSF. In persons exposed to tick-infested habitats, prompt careful inspection and removal of crawling or attached ticks is an important method of prevention. It may take extended attachment time before the organisms are transmitted from the tick to the host. The following measures should be followed when a person will be exposed to areas where ticks are naturally present:

- Wear light-colored clothing which allows you to see ticks that are crawling on your clothing.
- Tuck your pants legs into your socks so that ticks cannot crawl up the inside of your pants legs.
- Apply repellents to discourage tick attachment. Repellents containing permethrin can be sprayed on boots and clothing, and will last for several days. Repellents containing DEET can be applied to the skin, but will last only a few hours before it needs to be

reapplied. Use DEET with caution on children. Large amounts of DEET on children has been associated with adverse reactions.

- When returning from possible tick infested area search your entire body for ticks and remove any you find. Parents should check children for ticks.

To remove a tick use fine tipped tweezers. Never touch the tick with your bare hands. Use a tissue, paper towel or gloves to protect your hands. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull upward with steady, even pressure. Do not twist or jerk as this may cause the mouthparts to break off in the skin. If this happens, remove with tweezers. Thoroughly disinfect the bite site and wash your hand with soap and water after removing the tick. Do not squeeze or crush the tick because its fluids may contain infectious organisms. Place the tick in a plastic bag and save in the freezer in case you become ill. Be sure to

date the bag.

Folklore remedies, such as the use of petroleum jelly or hot matches, do not encourage a tick to detach from the skin. In fact, they may make matters worse by irritating the tick and stimulating it to release additional saliva, increasing the chance of transmitting the organism.

American Dog Tick



Brown Dog Tick



Rocky Mountain Wood Tick

