

FOCUS

On Preparedness

Cherokee County Health Department

MRSA Prevention Measures

Frequent hand washing is the best way to prevent MRSA

There has been much media attention regarding MRSA infections in recent weeks. Most community-associated MRSA infections are skin infections that may appear as pustules or boils which are red, swollen, and painful.

Although MRSA skin infections can occur in any setting, there are several factors that make transmission easier. These factors are referred to as the 5 C's and are as follows: **Crowding**, frequent skin-to-skin **Contact**, **Compromised** skin (cuts or abrasions), **Contaminated** items and

surfaces, and lack of **Cleanliness**. Day care centers and schools fit perfectly within the 5 C's.

Many people question whether a school should close if a student is diagnosed with an MRSA infection. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is not necessary, in most cases, to close schools because of an MRSA infection in a student. Also, it is not usually necessary to notify the entire school community of a single MRSA infection.

Most MRSA infections are transmitted by either direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with surfaces that have been contaminated with someone else's infection. There are simple measures that can be taken to prevent MRSA infections:

- Practice good hygiene. Wash hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-base hand sanitizer. Shower immediately after participating in exercises or sports activities.
- Open wounds should be covered with a clean, dry dressing that is taped on all four sides or a bandage until healed.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, razors, or soap that come in contact with your skin.
- Use a barrier (towel) between your skin and shared equipment such as weight-training benches.
- Maintain a clean environment by establishing cleaning procedures for frequently touched surfaces and surfaces that come in direct contact with people's skin.
- Consider not letting athletes participate in any contact sport if they have potentially contagious wounds. Refer them to a medical provider for treatment.

CCHD Encourages Flu Shots

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Cherokee County Health Department (CCHD) is encouraging everyone to receive a flu shot as soon as possible at either CCHD location. Clinic hours are Monday - Thursday: 7:00 am to 12:00 pm and 1:00 pm to 5:00pm.

"Flu is more than just a bad cold that makes people feel uncomfortable," said Dr. David Lakey, DSHS Commissioner. "This viral infection can lead to a serious, sometimes deadly illness. An annual flu shot is one of the best ways to protect people from flu and its complications and to reduce

the spread of the virus."

Flu symptoms include a high fever; headache; extreme tiredness; dry cough; sore throat; runny or stuffy nose; and muscle aches. Flu is spread when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks, releasing the contagious virus into the air. Complications can include pneumonia, ear and sinus infections, dehydration and worsening of chronic conditions such as congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes. About 36,000 deaths occur in the U.S. from flu complications each year.

Coordinator's Corner

By: Julie Levett

The Department of State Health Services is making a big push for individuals and families to prepare for an emergency, whether it is for a hurricane, wildfires, disease outbreaks or terrorist attacks. Information about this campaign can be found in this edition of Focus on Preparedness. This is a great place to start preparedness planning for your family.

Public Health Preparedness has focused on Pandemic Influenza this past year. I have spoken the prophetic pandemic mantra of "it's not a matter of if but, when" many times. Historically pandemics occur three times in every 100 year cycle. Major news outlets do not talk about preparing for a pandemic but the threat is still very real.

Some of the projects we have worked on this past year include:

- Over 17,000 **pandemic flu fact sheets** and wallet

cards were mailed to households in Cherokee County. If you did not receive a copy give us a call or email and we will be glad to send you one.

- Cherokeeflu.com is a web site setup and devoted to all things pandemic: what a pandemic is, what to expect, how to prepare, and links to other web sites with additional information. A link to the **Pandemic flu fact sheets** can be accessed from this website.
- A billboard has been placed on Highway 69 N in Jacksonville asking the question "Are You Prepared?" It also gives our web address for Cherokeeflu.com.
- Meetings and/or presentations have been held with over 80 businesses, civic organizations, and faith

based groups on pandemic flu and preparedness.

- CCHD held the "Pandemic Influenza Conference: Preparing Your Response" for businesses in May. Representatives from more than 50 area businesses attended.
- School superintendents and nurses were invited to a pandemic flu planning conference held in October. Tool kits with information and handouts were provided to each school district.
- CCHD participated in the TRANSCAER evacuation drill held in Jacksonville in September.

The Public Health Preparedness staff is available to speak to your business or organization on

pandemic flu or preparedness issues. If you would like to schedule a meeting, call us at 903-683-6142.

CCHD continues to recruit medical and non-medical volunteers to staff Point of Distribution Clinics (PODs). POD volunteers would mass distribute medications to citizens of Cherokee County in the event of a wide scale disease outbreak. POD volunteers and their household members would be given medications prior to the general public. Please contact CCHD at 903-683-6142 if you are interested in volunteering.

New Campaign Urges Texans to Prepare for Emergencies

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) launched a new campaign encouraging Texans to prepare themselves and their families for potential disasters -- from hurricanes to influenza.

"Ready or Not? HAVE A PLAN" or "¿Estás Listo? HAGAMOS UN PLAN" uses radio, television, newspaper and outdoor advertising; community outreach events; and a new interactive Web site to encourage every Texan to create an emergency plan.

"Family emergency planning is essential," said Dr. David

Lahey, DSHS Commissioner. "It's easy, and the time to do it is now."

Lahey said that the "Ready or Not?" campaign will help people understand how to get started.

"Severe storms, tornadoes, wildfires and other disasters can strike at any time in Texas. The most important way to protect your family and yourself is to be prepared," said Jack Colley, chief of the Governor's Division of Emergency Management. "Protecting your family means taking time to make a Family Plan before disaster strikes."

The new web site at

www.TexasPrepares.org or www.TexasPrepara.org offers people a way to build a custom plan online. A number of interactive features allow users to get a list of documents that families should put in a waterproof storage bag and keep in a safe place, a customized emergency supply list, wallet-sized cards to designate emergency contacts and links to emergency information.

Those without internet access may call 2-1-1 for help developing an emergency plan and kit or for referrals to local sites that offer free internet access.

"The most important way to protect your family and yourself is to be prepared"

Disease 101: E-Coli 0157:H7

Escherichia coli, better known as E-coli, is a bacteria that normally lives in the intestines of mammals and actually assists with waste processing, vitamin K production, and food absorption. There are hundreds of strains of E-coli, most of which are harmless. E-coli 0157:H7 is a particularly virulent strain and is one of the leading causes of food borne illnesses, responsible for thousands of infections each year in the U.S.

People become infected with E-coli 0157:H7 in a number of ways. Most illnesses have been attributed to eating undercooked, contaminated ground beef. Contaminated bean sprouts, fresh leafy vegetables, raw milk and juices have also been credited with causing infections. Swimming in or drinking sewage-contaminated water has been linked to infections. Person-to-person contact in families and child care centers is also a known mode of transmission. Poor hand hygiene, especially

in children can cause infections.

People generally become ill with E-coli 0157:H7 infections within 2-8 days of exposure. Most infections cause severe, bloody diarrhea and abdominal cramping. Sometimes non-bloody diarrhea will occur with no other symptoms. Fever, if present, is usually low-grade.

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) can be caused by E-coli 0157:H7 entering the urinary tract through the urethra. UTIs are more common in females than males due to the shorter urethra in females. Poor toilet habits can predispose females to these ascending infections. Pyelonephritis, infection of the kidneys, may be hematogenous, or spread by blood.

E-coli 0157:H7 infections can result in a serious complication called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) in which red blood cells are

destroyed and the kidneys fail. In the U.S., HUS is the principle cause of acute kidney failure in children.

People suffering from diarrhea usually recover from E-coli infection within 5-10 days without antibiotics or other specific treatment. Antidiarrheal medications should be avoided. Those developing HUS are usually treated in the intensive care unit and often require kidney dialysis. The death rate for HUS is 3-5%.

Protect yourself and your family from E-coli infections using these steps:

- Ground beef should be cooked until the thickest part of the meat reaches 160°F on a meat thermometer.
- After preparing meat dishes in the kitchen, use a bleach solution to sanitize counters, utensils, cutting boards, and other surfaces. Make this solution with 1 teaspoon bleach to 1 quart of water.
- Use a different cutting

board and utensils for fruits, vegetables, and breads from the one used for meats.

- Wash fruits and vegetables well.
- Use only pasteurized milk, dairy products and juices.
- Use safe water. Drink water from an approved public drinking water system, bottled water, or water that has been treated with chlorine or another disinfectant. Do not swim in water that has sewage in it. E-coli 0157:H7 can live in untreated water.
- Make sure everyone in your family practices good hand hygiene: wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Wash hands after using the restroom, changing diapers, before and after handling raw foods.

Handy Hints for Preparedness

To make your own alcohol gel hand sanitizer, follow this recipe:

- 4 cups 70% rubbing alcohol
- 4 teaspoons of glycerin

Mix to make approximately one quart of hand sanitizer.

* Rubbing alcohol can be acutely toxic if ingested. Always supervise children's use of hand sanitizers.

“Remember: when disaster strikes, the time to prepare has passed.”

Steven Cyros

“It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.

Howard Rutt

Most people don't think of a disaster until it is too late: then they suddenly realize how unprepared they are. Don't let this be you.

Prepare Now!

When making your family's emergency preparedness plan, please remember your whole family. Your animals are affected by emergencies and disasters also. For information on emergency preparation for animals go to the American Veterinary Medical Association's website at www.avma.org/disaster/saving_





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On-line Resources

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

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Home Care of a Flu Patient

During a pandemic flu, many ill people will have to be cared for at home by family. Dehydration is a common symptom of the flu and can happen when body fluids that are lost are not replaced quickly enough. To keep properly hydrated sip at least one cup of water, tea, juice, soup, or other nonalcoholic beverage every waking hour. That's two to four quarts of liquid a day, which loosens pulmonary secretions to help rid the body of the virus and prevent the dehydration that accompanies fever. If you or the person you are nursing isn't eating, electrolytes can be added to the rehydration solution.

Recipe for Rehydration Solution

- 1 quart (or liter) drinking water
- 2 tablespoons of sugar
- ¼ teaspoon of table salt
- ¼ teaspoon of baking soda

Mix to make approximately one quart

If available, adding ¼ teaspoon of salt substitute (potassium chloride), ½ cup of orange juice or coconut water, or half of a large mashed ripe banana would add potassium. The solution can be flavored with lemon juice or a sugar-free powdered drink mix. If baking soda is unavailable, substitute another ¼ teaspoon of salt. If a person is too sick

to drink, fluid can be given literally drop by drop until the patient recovers. Treating influenza outside of a medical setting is less a matter of feeding or starving a fever than it is of drowning it.

Fever reduction is a controversial subject. Fever may be uncomfortable, but it has a beneficial effect on the course of many infections. Elevated temperatures have been shown to inhibit influenza virus replication. Again, our body usually knows best. Artificially breaking a fever with drugs like acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin) may make us feel better, but we may be undermining our body's ability to fight. A cool cloth on the forehead can make us feel better without lowering our internal virus-fighting fever.

Drugs should be considered, though, when the febrile discomfort or muscle aches interfere with sleep, which is also important for recovery. High fevers—over 104°F—should definitely be treated. A combination of acetaminophen and ibuprofen, both taken at the same time, and tepid-water sponge-baths should successfully bring down almost any high fever. Aspirin should *never* be given to a child because of the risk of a rare but serious side effect known as Reye's syndrome. Chicken soup might be out of the question during a bird flu pandemic, but warm liquids in general can relieve symptomatic congestion and may also beneficially raise the temperature of the respiratory passageways.