

Epi Update for Friday, November 17, 2023

CENTER FOR ACUTE DISEASE EPIDEMIOLOGY (CADE)
BUREAU OF HIV, STI, AND HEPATITIS

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Items for this week's Epi Update include

- **Congenital syphilis increases in the U.S. and Iowa**
- **CDC: High blood lead levels in children consuming recalled cinnamon applesauce pouches**
- **Cooking for large groups**

Congenital syphilis increases in the U.S. and Iowa

Last week, CDC released an MMWR highlighting increases in congenital syphilis and missed opportunities in prevention in the U.S. Lack of timely testing and treatment of pregnant women with syphilis stands out as a common association.

Syphilis increases in Iowa have mirrored those of the nation as a whole. From 2018 to 2022, infectious syphilis cases in Iowa increased more than 260%, and congenital syphilis has followed a similar trend. Congenital syphilis was once a rare occurrence in Iowa, with one case or fewer reported annually. However, the 11 cases reported in Iowa in 2021 was more than the previous 20 years combined. With several weeks remaining in 2023, Iowa has already exceeded the number of cases reported in all of 2022.

The MMWR highlights that the causes of congenital syphilis are multifactorial. There are many reasons women may present late to prenatal care or not access prenatal care at all, including limited access based on geographic location or insurance status, language barriers, and structural inequities. There has also been a nationwide shortage of benzathine penicillin G, the first line and only approved treatment for pregnant women.

Considering these trends, Iowa HHS recommends serological testing for syphilis among pregnant women at three intervals: during their first prenatal visit, at 28-32 weeks gestation, and again at delivery. Pregnant women may initially test negative at their first prenatal visit and acquire the infection later in pregnancy. Symptoms may not be obvious. Furthermore, neonates with congenital syphilis may appear normal at physical examination, particularly if the mother acquired the infection late in pregnancy. These infants may develop a rapid onset of symptoms several months after birth.

Serologic testing for syphilis is widely available. Laboratory diagnosis requires a minimum of two types of serologic tests: "treponemal" and "non-treponemal" tests.

- Treponemal tests detect antibodies to *Treponema pallidum*.
- Non-treponemal tests (e.g., RPR or VDRL) detect cellular damage caused by *Treponema pallidum* and provide quantitative results that are crucial in guiding treatment decisions, especially in infants.

Syphilis testing algorithms with reflex testing are recommended, so that if the first test is reactive, the subsequent test(s) is automatically conducted. For reverse and traditional algorithms, visit

www.aphl.org/programs/infectious_disease/std/Pages/Syphilis.aspx.

For syphilis treatment guidelines, visit www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/syphilis.htm.

Although there is currently a nationwide shortage of the first line medication used to treat syphilis in adults, the medication is prioritized for pregnant women. Please contact Iowa HHS if you have difficulty obtaining the medication.

The Iowa HHS Bureau of HIV, STI, and Hepatitis can support in interpreting laboratory results, discussing treatment guidelines, facilitating contact tracing, and more. For questions, call 515-240-1143. In addition, the STD Clinical Consultation Network at the St. Louis Prevention and Treatment Center offers clinical consultation for complex syphilis cases. For more information, visit www.stdccn.org.

To view the full MMWR article, visit www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7246e1.htm?s_cid=mm7246e1_w.

CDC: High blood lead levels in children consuming recalled cinnamon applesauce pouches

Multiple states have reported a total of 22 potential cases to FDA of high blood lead levels (BLLs) in children consuming recalled cinnamon-containing applesauce products that have high levels of lead. No cases have been identified in Iowa.

CDC recently released a HAN Advisory to advise clinicians to consider the possibility of illness due to lead exposure and report cases to public health. WanaBana, Schnucks, and Weis have initiated voluntary recalls of certain lots of the following products:

- WanaBana brand apple cinnamon fruit purée pouches
- Schnucks brand cinnamon applesauce pouches
- Weis brand cinnamon applesauce pouches

Counsel patients or their caregivers and guardians not to eat specific cinnamon-containing apple purée or applesauce products named in the FDA recall announcements. Children who have consumed a recalled applesauce pouch product should be tested for lead exposure.

To view the full CDC HAN, including more information about the recalled products, symptoms of lead poisoning, and testing guidelines, visit emergency.cdc.gov/han/2023/han00500.asp.

Cooking for large groups

Preparing food for large groups can be a risk factor for the spread of enteric illnesses, such as *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, and more. Untrained food handlers might not be familiar with important food safety considerations that apply to cooking large amounts of food. USDA and FSIS have guidelines to help volunteers prepare and serve food safely for large groups, such as family reunions, church dinners, and community gatherings, many of which take place during the holiday season.

Cooking For Large Groups: A Volunteer's Guide To Food Safety can be found at www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/cooking-groups.

Have a healthy and happy week!

Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology
800-362-2736

Bureau of HIV, STI, and Hepatitis
515-281-6801

There will be no Epi Update released next Friday, November 24, due to the holiday.