

Microbe Monthly

Communicable Disease Report

El Paso County Department
of Health & Environment

August 2008

Animal to Human Diseases (“Zoonoses”)

Zoonoses are diseases transmitted from animals to humans. Many zoonotic diseases are endemic in wild animals in Colorado and El Paso County—including plague, tularemia, West Nile virus, rabies and hantavirus. People may come in contact with wild animals or insect vectors more frequently during the warm weather season in Colorado, increasing the likelihood of exposure to zoonotic diseases. It is important for clinicians to understand the sources of exposure and risk of infection when evaluating patients with possible zoonotic infections.

West Nile virus (WNV) is transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. WNV arrived in Colorado in 2003 and is now endemic throughout the state. Two clinically different types of disease occur in humans: viral fever syndrome and meningoencephalitis. Symptoms of the viral fever syndrome include fever, headache and malaise. These symptoms persist for about 2-7 days. In rare cases, the virus can cause aseptic meningitis or encephalitis. This summer’s WNV season has been notably mild with only 34 cases reported statewide through August 25 (no cases yet from El Paso County). Culex mosquito counts are low as are mosquito WNV infection rates. However, the WNV season typically extends through September, so the Health Department will continue to monitor surveillance closely.

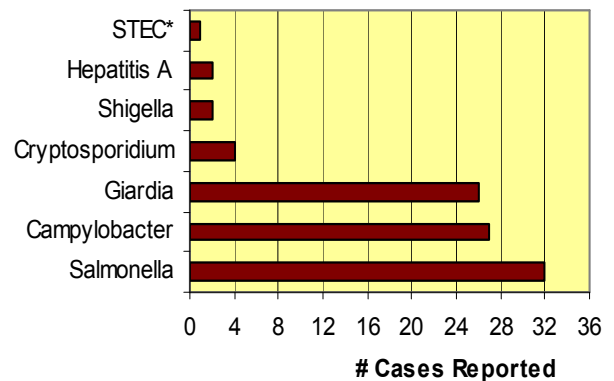
Rabies is the most serious zoonotic disease in the United States. Animal rabies is most prominent in wild animals—including bats, raccoons, skunks and foxes. In Colorado, bats have been the only endemic species for the past 30 years. However, recent surveillance has shown widespread activity in skunks in counties along the eastern portion of Colorado. A rabid raccoon and cat from Cheyenne County were reported in July; this represents the first case of raccoon rabies since 1963 and the first rabid domestic cat since 1985. Rabies in these animal species highlights the significantly increased risk of spillover infections that occur when terrestrial mammal rabies is circulating in an area. Public health is very concerned to see an increase in skunk rabies occurring at a time when there is a national shortage of rabies vaccine. Refer to the Health Department’s Web site for recommendations about rabies: www.elpasocountyhealth.org.

Plague is a disease of wild rodents and is transmitted to humans primarily from bites of infected fleas. In Colorado, human disease is often associated with exposure to household pets who bring fleas into the home. Symptoms are characterized by the abrupt onset of high fever, chills, malaise, myalgia and enlarged tender lymph nodes. Plague can be effectively treated with appropriate antibiotics, but clinical outcome is dependent on prompt diagnosis and treatment.

El Paso County Disease Trends

- In July 2008, 42 communicable diseases were reported and investigated: *Campylobacter* (4), chronic hepatitis B (5), cryptosporidiosis (1), *Giardia* (6), *Haemophilus influenzae* (2), hepatitis A (1), invasive pneumococcal disease (3), listeriosis (1), pertussis (1), *Salmonella* (8), *Shigella* (1), varicella (1), vibriosis (1) and viral meningitis (7). A *Salmonella* case reported on June 30 was later found to match the type implicated in the national *Salmonella* Saintpaul (tomato/pepper) outbreak, bringing our county total to 3. (See chart at right for comparison of enterics year-to-date).
- In July, the Communicable Disease Program received 14 possible food-borne illness complaints—bringing year-to-date total to 111 complaints. Additionally, 2 outbreaks were investigated: 1 confirmed campylobacter outbreak in a family and 1 gastrointestinal illness associated with a retail food establishment.
- Thus far in 2008, there have been 35 illness outbreaks reported: 8 influenza in long-term care facilities (LTCF); 10 norovirus/gastrointestinal in LTCFs; 13 outbreaks associated with retail food establishments; 3 outbreaks associated with schools; and 1 outbreak in a home.

Most Commonly Reported Enteric Diseases, El Paso County January-July, 2008



*shiga-toxin producing *E. coli*

Hot Topics—State and National

- Update on *Salmonella* Saintpaul Outbreak: As of August 25, a total of 1,442 persons have been reported infected with the outbreak strain nationwide. Sixteen confirmed cases have been reported in Colorado from the following counties: Adams (2); Denver (2); Douglas (1); El Paso (3); Montezuma (2); Otero (2); Pueblo (3); and Weld (1). The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) traced the source of jalapeno peppers from two restaurant-associated outbreaks to a Texas distributor who received their product from a farm in Tamaulipas, Mexico. A full report can be found at: www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5734a1.htm.
- The 2008-09 Influenza season will soon be upon us. CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has published their latest recommendations on vaccination and use of antiviral drugs. For further information go to: www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5707a1.htm.

Contact Information

CD/TB Program
Weekday Hours 719-578-3220
After-Hours Emergency 719-385-9622

Immunizations 719-578-3272

Environmental Health 719-575-8636

STD Program 719-578-3296
(Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Hep C, HIV/AIDS, Blood-borne Exposures)

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
Weekday Hours 303-692-2700
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