

NEWS RELEASE

September 18, 2014

For immediate release

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Enterovirus D-68: Public health urges healthy habits

For the past several weeks Panhandle Public Health District and other health departments across Nebraska have been keeping a close eye on a respiratory illness, Enterovirus D-68 (EV-D68) that has caused an increase in children being hospitalized in several states.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), from mid-August to September 18, 2014, a total of 153 people from 18 states have been confirmed to have a respiratory illness caused by EV-D68. Nebraska was added to the list of 18 states affected by EV-D68 on September 17th when a resident of the Nebraska Panhandle was confirmed to be infected with the virus.

EV-D68 is one of many non-polio enteroviruses and can cause mild to severe respiratory illness. Enteroviruses are very common viruses; more than 100 types are known. Each year, an estimated 10 to 15 million enterovirus infections occur in the United States. EV-D68 was first identified in California in 1962 and until recently when compared with other enteroviruses, EV-D68 has been rarely reported in the United States for the last 40 years.

“Anyone can get infected with enteroviruses, but infants, children, and teenagers are more likely to get infected and become sick because they do not yet have immunity (protection) from previous exposures to the viruses,” states Becky Corman, RN Public Health Nurse for PPHD.

People infected with EV-D68 may have no symptoms or only mild cold-like symptoms, but some infections can be serious. Infants and people with weakened immune systems have a greater chance of having severe illness and experiencing complications such as wheezing and difficulty breathing.

Since EV-D68 causes respiratory illness, the virus can be found in an infected person’s respiratory secretions, such as saliva, nasal mucus, or sputum. EV-D68 likely spreads from person to person when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or touches contaminated surfaces. “There is no vaccine to protect you from EV-D68 infection,” Corman stated “but there are some simple steps, like practicing good hand washing that can help protect you from getting sick.”

You can help protect yourself and others from EV-D68 by taking the following steps:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact, such as touching and shaking hands, with people who are sick
- Avoid sharing cups or eating utensils with people who are sick
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys and doorknobs
- Stay home when you are sick

In the upcoming weeks, it is likely that more states will have confirmed cases of EV-D68 infection and more cases may be identified in Nebraska. The CDC reports that several states are investigating clusters of people with severe respiratory illness, and specimens are still being tested for EV-D68. EV-D68 can only be diagnosed by doing specific lab tests on specimens from a person’s nose and throat. Many hospitals and some doctor’s offices can test ill patients to see if they have enterovirus infection. However, most cannot do specific testing to determine the type of enterovirus, like EV-D68. Respiratory illnesses can be caused by many different viruses and have similar symptoms. Not all respiratory illnesses occurring now are due to EV-D68. Anyone with

respiratory illness should contact their doctor if they are having difficulty breathing, or if their symptoms are getting worse.

For more information, please visit www.pphd.org or call 308-262-2217 or toll-free 855-227-2217. Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community.