

SLCHD EPIDEMIOLOGY PAGES

SUMMER (MAY-JULY) 2007; VOLUME V

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The St. Lucie County Health Department's Epidemiology programs are on the front lines of disease control and prevention through the use of surveillance techniques and the analysis of communicable and environmental disease information. It is the charge of this department to investigate reported cases of all communicable diseases and/or disease clusters. In this issue, we will address a community concern, health and safety tips for going back to school, and communicable disease analysis.

METHICILLIN-REISTANT STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, MRSA, is an antibiotic resistant skin infection that is seen in highly populated areas, such as schools, hospitals, dormitory housing, and prisons/jails. MRSA is not an illness that is reported to the county health departments, but it is a problem for all ages. State officials tracking MRSA have noticed that there has been more instances of Staphylococci bacteria resistant to common antibiotics in comparison to nonresistant strains.

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Community acquired MRSA are infections seen in the public, outside of a hospital or health care facility. Anyone that is in close personal contact with others needs to be aware of this type of skin infection. MRSA enters the body through a break in the skin and it initially resembles that of a bug bite. It is transmitted by having direct skin-to-skin contact, which allows the bacteria to spread from person to person.

Common symptoms of MRSA include redness and tenderness of the skin, and boils or abscesses on the skin. Since MRSA can cause serious blood and lung infections, it is important to seek medical attention immediately if you notice a boil or puss-filled pimple on your skin. MRSA is diagnosed through laboratory testing. A physician can send a sample of the infected wound, blood, or urine to the lab to grow the bacteria and determine which antibiotics would kill the bacteria. MRSA is treated by either having the wound drained by a physician, taking a prescribed antibiotic medicine, and/or using an ointment and washing your skin daily with an antimicrobial soap to help reduce the MRSA bacteria on the skin.

The best way to prevent MRSA is by practicing good hygiene. Such practices include washing hands frequently with soap and water and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizer, keeping cuts in the skin clean and covered with a bandage to avoid contact with other people's wounds, and refraining from the use of other people's personal items. If someone is infected with MRSA follow these tips to prevent the spreading of the bacteria:

- Cover the wound with clean, dry bandages
- Keep hands clean at all times by washing with soap and warm water or using alcohol-based sanitizer
- Do not share personal items (i.e. towels, washcloths, razors, undergarments, body sponges).
- Wash all sheets, towels, and clothing with warm water and detergent and dry them in a hot dryer.
- Keep your personal environment clean by wiping frequently touched surfaces (i.e. countertops, doorknobs, light switches) with a disinfectant.

For further information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention website at www.cdc.gov.



SCHOOL BUS SMARTS

Twenty-five million students ride on school buses. If your child or family member is a school bus rider, please follow these safety tips to help prevent injury:

- Line up facing the school bus door--not along the side of the school bus.
- Don't play in the street while waiting for the school bus.
- Carry your belongings in a backpack or book bag.
- Never reach under a school bus to get anything that has rolled or fallen underneath.
- After getting off the school bus, move immediately onto the sidewalk, out of traffic.
- Wait for a signal from the bus driver before you cross the street. Walk at least 10 steps away from the front of the bus so that the bus driver can see you.
- Never cross the street behind the school bus.

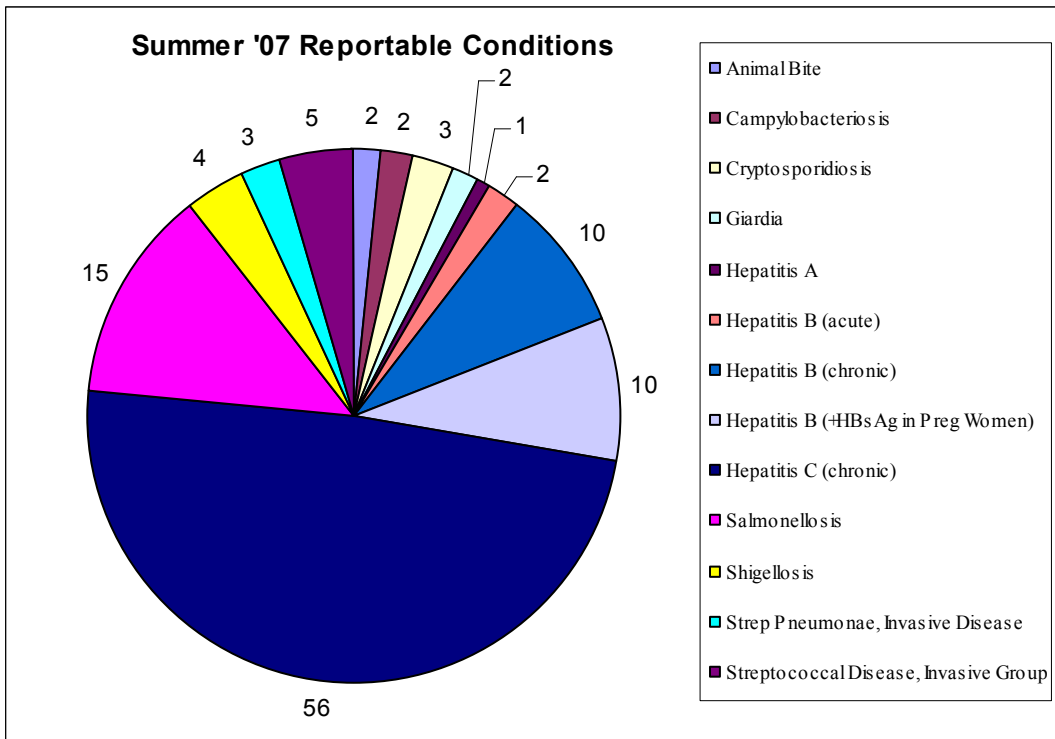
PREVENTING HEAT RELATED ILLNESSES

- **Dress for the heat.** Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Light colors will reflect away some of the sun's energy. It is also a good idea to wear hats or to use an umbrella.
- **Drink water.** Carry water or juice with you and drink continuously even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid alcohol and caffeine, which dehydrate the body.
- **Eat small meals and eat more often.** Avoid foods that are high in protein which increase metabolic heat.
- **Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician.**
- **Slow down.** Avoid strenuous activity. If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day, which is usually in the morning between 4:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m.
- **Stay indoors when possible.**
- **Take regular breaks** when engaged in physical activity on warm days. Take time out to find a cool place. If you recognize that you or someone else is showing the signs of a heat-related illness, stop activity and find a cool place. Remember, have fun, but stay cool!

For more information on health and safety tips, please visit www.recross.org/services/hss

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE SUMMER 2007 ANALYSIS

Diseases	Quarter Total	Frequency
Animal Bite	2	1.74
Campylobacteriosis	2	1.74
Cryptosporidiosis	3	2.61
Giardia	2	1.74
Hepatitis A	1	0.87
Hepatitis B (acute)	2	1.74
Hepatitis B (chronic)	10	8.70
Hepatitis B (+HBsAg in Preg Women)	10	8.70
Hepatitis C (chronic)	56	48.70
Salmonellosis	15	13.04
Shigellosis	4	3.48
Strep Pneumoniae, Invasive Disease	3	2.61
Streptococcal Disease, Invasive Group	5	4.35
TOTAL	115	



SLCHD investigated 115 confirmed cases of reportable diseases and conditions from May—July 2007. The above listed diseases were all reported to the St. Lucie County Health Department from various community providers. The most frequently reported illness was Hepatitis C occupying 48.6% of the case load, followed by Salmonella with 13.0% and Hepatitis B (Chronic and Pregnant Women) with 8.7% each. For more information on Communicable Diseases and Conditions, please contact Charisma Atkins, Epidemiologist at Charisma_Atkins@doh.state.fl.us or (772) 462-3812 with the St. Lucie County Health Department.