

Cover Sheet

DATE: September 13, 2013

SUBJECT: Communicable Disease Letter to Schools

INSTRUCTIONS:

REDISTRIBUTE AT YOUR DISCRETION. Share this information with relevant SMEs or contacts (internal and external) as you see fit.

For LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT reference only

DPHHS Subject Matter Resource for more information regarding this HAN, contact:

**DPHHS CDCP
Epidemiology Section
1-406-444-0273**

**DPHHS Health Alert Hotline:
1-800-701-5769**

**DPHHS HAN Website:
www.han.mt.gov**

**REMOVE THIS COVER SHEET BEFORE REDISTRIBUTING
AND REPLACE IT WITH YOUR OWN**

Please ensure that DPHHS is included on your HAN distribution list.

Categories of Health Alert Messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Information Service: passes along low level priority messages that do not fit other HAN categories and are for informational purposes only.

Please call DPHHS to update contact information at 444-0919 or 444-6906

Information Sheet

Date: September 13, 2013

Subject: Communicable Disease Letter to Schools

Background:

DPHHS is sending out information on immunization reporting requirements to school administrators. Included is a brief letter regarding communicable diseases in schools and current disease trends among school-aged children in Montana.

Information:

Schools inherently foster the transmission of infections from person to person because they are a group setting in which people are in close contact and share supplies and equipment. The attached letter provides background, prevention and resource information to schools including a link to a new website that specifically houses materials for schools.

Recommendations:

DPHHS encourages local health jurisdictions to forward the following information to local school contacts. The intent is to increase awareness about communicable disease prevention and control in schools and ensure they are aware of who the local public health contact is.

Dear School Administrators,

September 6, 2013

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services would like to remind you that communicable disease outbreaks in schools can be a common occurrence. During the first half of 2013, seven outbreaks in schools have been reported. During summer months, outbreak activity has subsided; however the continued transmission of pertussis and increased occurrence of shigellosis (a diarrheal illness caused by the bacterium *Shigella*) cases over the summer break spark concerns for the upcoming school year. Both diseases are highly contagious and easily spread from person to person.

By the end of August, almost 500 cases of **pertussis** have been confirmed in Montana. Most cases have been reported in school aged children (70% of cases were 5-17years old). Before 2012, on average 90 cases of pertussis were reported in Montana each year.

In south eastern Montana there has been an increase in **shigellosis** cases. Within the last few months, 25 cases have been reported in Montana, compared to an average year when 11 cases are reported. 44% of cases were in children less than 13 years old. School-aged children are at risk especially if they have diaper-aged siblings, as they are more likely to get this disease due to lack of toilet training.

As fall approaches the season for **influenza** (flu) and **norovirus** is nearing, propagating the spread of diseases amongst school children due to close personal contact and prolonged exposure to others. Seasonal outbreaks due to respiratory and diarrheal illness, in conjunction with above average activity of pertussis and shigellosis during summer months, remind us on the importance of prevention.

Most communicable diseases can be prevented by following the steps listed below:

1. **Hand washing:** Wash hands with soap and warm water frequently, especially after using the restroom. Give children enough time to properly wash their hands.
 - Proper hand washing is the **single** most important behavior in preventing the transmission of many infectious diseases.
2. **Exclusion:** Exclude ill children and staff from school when ill. Avoid close contact with others during the infectious period. Consult with ARM or local public health for guidance.
3. **Education:** Be informed about signs, symptoms and prevention of diseases. Share information with students and parents. Learning *how* diseases are transmitted can help to actively *prevent* the spread of disease.
4. **Disinfect surfaces:** Clean and disinfect surfaces or objects. Focus especially on frequently touched surfaces at home, work and school.
5. **Vaccinate:** Be sure to check immunization status of children for those diseases that can be prevented with vaccines.
6. **Seek care:** Visit your health care provider when ill to get diagnosed and treated properly.

Consult with your local health jurisdictions for guidance and questions. Together we can prevent illnesses and keep our children and communities healthy.

More resources and information are available at the DPHHS website: schoolhealth.mt.gov