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Director

HEALTH HIGHLIGHTS



ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, 606 WEST 2ND STREET, ERIE, PA 16507

Our Mission: The mission of the Department of Health is to preserve, promote, and protect the health, safety and well being of the people and the environment in the county.

Summer Food Safety



Summer picnics are here! Swinging soirées with homemade potato salad, fresh cut watermelon, juicy burgers and...**diarrhea? Vomiting? Fever and chills?** Most of us have experienced these symptom

after a picnic at some point and blamed it on "too much dessert" or "one too many cocktails." Did you ever think about the **safety** of the food and not the **quantity** that you consumed?

Bacteria, viruses and parasites are out there lurking in our food, waiting to strike if we give them the opportunity. Every year, 76 million people get sick from something that they eat. We hear about the salmonella outbreaks in chicken and e.coli in hamburger, but we don't readily think about the risks of poor hand washing by our neighbors hosting the block party or unsafe temperatures at the pig roast held by the in-laws.

What can we do to prevent foodborne illness? Here are some simple ways to ensure the safety of your guests while they attend your gathering!

1. Wash Your Hands!

Think for a moment about everything your hands touch prior to preparing food. You pumped gas on the way to the store, rubbed your itchy eye, and opened your front door with the keys that fell on the floor (or worse). Your hands touch everything in the restroom, and everything in the kitchen...Wash the germs away!

2. Separate raw and cooked/ready to eat foods.

Most of us are unnerved by that undercooked piece of chicken on our plates, but have you thought about where the chicken was prior to cooking? Ensure that any raw meats are stored in a different cooler than your cooked or prepared foods. Anytime raw juices or ice contaminated with the raw juices, come in contact with the top of a pop can or the pasta salad, you are exposing your guests to risky bacteria. Also, wash that platter that was carrying the raw steaks or burgers before you put the cooked steaks back on that same platter. Don't allow your cooked food to touch the raw juices!

3. Ice, ice, and more ice!

Prior to cooking or serving, your food must be kept cold. Bacteria grow best at the warm summer temperatures of 90 to 100°F. Your food needs to be **buried** in the ice, not just sitting on top. When the potato salad sits on top of the ice, the bottom might be cold, but the rest of the huge bowl is sitting at room temperature, giving bacteria a great opportunity to grow.

4. Use your thermometer!

A good digital thermometer sells for \$12 to \$20 and can be purchased at any store that sells groceries or home items. Clean it in between uses, and this simple tool can save your life (as well as take the guesswork out of when the food is "done.")

5. If you're sick, don't prepare food!

Foodborne illness is extremely contagious and spreads very easily from person to

person. If you have been sick with diarrhea, vomiting, or sore throat with a fever DO NOT PREPARE FOOD! Let someone else make the food, order out, or reschedule!

With these tips, you can try to ensure that your guests are safe at the end of the party and 24-48 hours after they leave!



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Protect Yourself from Rabies



Putting out a bowl of milk for the *neighborhood kitty* may be seen as an act of kindness, but it could expose you or your family to the deadly rabies virus. Last year Pennsylvania saw an increase in cats which tested positive for rabies; the count was up to 55 infected cats from 27 in 2007. Many of them were strays.

These cats, like the other 400-500 animals testing positive each year in PA, can transmit the rabies virus to people through their saliva from a bite or scratch. This trend is of concern because cats and dogs are a natural link between wildlife and people. The vast majority of Pennsylvania's rabid animals have been skunks and raccoons, with cases in bats and foxes to a lesser extent. As long as bats are kept out of homes, people can usually avoid contact with these animals.

The chance for human rabies increases drastically when unvaccinated cats or dogs are allowed to move about between wildlife and people. Perhaps we take for granted the impact of such measures as the Mass Dog Vaccination Campaign begun in 1945. Before this public health effort, up to 16 people died in PA every year from rabies; an awful death ending in delirium and convulsions. Since the Dog Law for rabies vaccination, except for one case in 1984, no one has died in PA since 1952. Let's keep it that way!

This is not the situation in many South American and Asian countries. Huge numbers of people die annually

from rabies in places where stray dogs roam freely and bites are common. Travelers should keep this fact in mind and take the recommended precautions.

In our own back yard we can take simple precautions to protect ourselves from rabies:

- Teach your children not to play with or handle wild animals they may find. Most recent rabies deaths from bat exposures were in people who did not realize the risk.
- Steer clear of stray dogs and cats. They may look friendly and surprise you with an unprovoked bite or scratch. If these strays cannot be located and watched for ten days to rule out rabies, you may need a series of rabies vaccine yourself.
- Most importantly, keep your own pet's vaccinations up to date. Hard economic times may tempt you to cut corners and skip this responsibility. In the long run, it could cost you much more time and money, if you or your family would need to receive human vaccine and rabies immune globulin. Human rabies has to be prevented. There is no known cure once symptoms show up.

For pet vaccinations:

- Start with your own veterinarian for the most complete care.
- Rabies vaccine is a low cost vaccine. It is usually cheaper to keep up with vaccinations than to get behind and have to restart with boosters.
- East Erie Animal Wellness Center, a consortium of vets who offer low cost vaccinations, can be reached at 814-314-1518.
- Watch for news of vaccination clinics held at local shelters

All mammal bites and scratches are reportable to the Erie County Department of Health at 814-451-6700.



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There are No-Zones for Using Your Cell Phone While Driving



Everything has a place and time. In particular, the cell phone has developed rapidly in recent years and, in a big way, it has legitimately found its time. The idea of cellular communications is credited to

Bell Laboratories, the research division of AT&T, in 1947. But Dr. Martin Cooper, an inventor and general manager for the systems division at Motorola was first to demonstrate a portable cell phone application in April of 1973. It weighed over 2 pounds! In contrast, a mobile phone today weighs about 3 ounces.

Convenience and ease, portability, miniaturization, and a powerful utility have contributed to the cell phone phenomenon. In thirty years of development, we have certainly witnessed the achievement of Dr. Cooper's goal—the ability for "people to be able to carry their phones with them anywhere." However, there can be a problem *when technology meets social responsibility*.

It seems there is no place too sacred for sending or receiving calls and/or messages. But now it's time to recognize and respect that there ARE sacred NO-zones. We must know when to put the cell phone down, disengage from it, and turn it off—for our own safety and for the safety of others. Most of us would consider it a personal tragedy to, in an instant, be responsible for an avoidable crash or even negligent homicide. Yet, this tragedy is happening more each year.

In 2008, drivers who weren't paying attention took nearly 6,000 lives and caused half a million injuries nationwide, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The number one No-Zone for using a cell phone is in a moving vehicle. Reaction time is reduced considerably when you are talking or texting. Mental concentration is inescapably divided and diverted. According to researchers at the University of Utah, using a cell phone while driving, whether it is hand-held or hands-free, delays a driver's reactions as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent.

A cell phone conversation can be more dangerous than talking with a passenger in the vehicle. A passenger is also aware of the driving and road

conditions and can alert the driver to imminent dangers in and around the vehicle. The voice or message on the phone, however, can only contribute to distractions. This applies to driving and talking on a cell phone while in a school zone or work area, on a highway, or in a pedestrian or residential area. These are all NO-Zones for using the cell phone.

It's not easy to resist the cell phone while driving. Sometimes taking small steps can lead to improved behavior. Try this: place a Post-it note on your cell phone when resting it in your car. Just write "Do Not Use When Driving" and follow your own restriction. If you have overwhelming circumstances that require you to receive calls or make them, find a safe place to park, such as at the curb or in a parking lot. Only then will you be giving full attention to your call and keeping yourself and others safe.

For more tips, go to ecdh.org—A Healthier America/Public Health Week, and click on "The No Cell Phone Zone." Also, refer to DriveSafePA.org.



Geof Crankshaw is the coordinator of the Northwest Regional Highway Safety Program at the Erie County Department of Health.

Pregnancy & Tobacco Use—A Dangerous Combination



Most people know that tobacco use is hazardous to a person's health. It causes heart disease, cancer, stroke, respiratory disease, and many other health problems. It is the number one cause of preventable death and disease in the United States and is responsible for approximately 440,000 deaths each year. But, did you ever wonder about the effects of tobacco on pregnant women and their unborn children? When a pregnant woman uses tobacco and/or is exposed to tobacco smoke during her pregnancy, she places her health, and the health of her developing child, at risk.

Pregnant women who use tobacco are at higher risk for miscarriage and premature labor than women who do not use tobacco during pregnancy. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that babies born to women who use tobacco during pregnancy have a 30% higher chance of being born prematurely. Using tobacco while pregnant also doubles a woman's risk of placenta previa—a condition that can affect child development and can cause severe bleeding during the delivery process. Tobacco use during pregnancy also affects the body's ability to deliver vital nutrients to a developing child.

When a pregnant woman uses tobacco, so does her unborn baby. Tobacco contains nitrosamines, or chemical compounds known to cause cancer. These nitrosamines can cross the placental barrier and affect child development. Tobacco smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals. Over 250 of these chemicals are toxic, and nearly 60 are known to cause cancer. Chemicals found in tobacco smoke include ammonia (found in household cleaners), carbon monoxide (a component of car exhaust), formaldehyde (found in embalming fluid), and arsenic (used as a deadly poison). These and other chemicals prevent the baby from getting the nutrients and oxygen he or she needs to grow, leading to low-birth weight. The March of Dimes reports that using tobacco during pregnancy nearly doubles a woman's risk of having a low-birth weight baby.

Babies born to women who use tobacco during pregnancy are three times more likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), three times more likely to develop asthma, and 50% more likely to be born with cleft lip or palate. Tobacco use during pregnancy also increases a child's risk of

chronic bronchitis and ear infections, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), and other learning problems. Approximately 29% of women in Erie County report using tobacco during pregnancy. This means that in 2009, approximately 936 babies were born to women who used tobacco while pregnant, and are at risk for related health complications.

One of the best gifts a woman can give herself and her developing child is to quit using tobacco and remind others that it is not okay to use tobacco around her. If you are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant, and you use tobacco, now is a good time to quit. For information about available programs contact the Northwest PA Tobacco Control Program at 814-451-6709, the PA Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669), or visit Quitnet.com. All programs are available at no cost.



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Reported Cases of Communicable Diseases in Erie County (1) – June 2010

- (1) Case reports processed and sent to PA DOH
- (2) Data incomplete due to reporting lag.
- (3) Reportable as of January 2002
- (4) Data includes both cases (culture) & suspect cases (antigen test).
- (5) Reportable in PA as of January 2003.

- (6) Data includes lab confirmed and epidemiologically linked cases.
- (7) Reportable as of January 26, 2005
- (8) May 2007-AIDS cases recalculated due to revised reporting system
- (9) STD morbidity statistics unavailable due to PA DOH computerized reporting system enhancements.

- + Revised number from previous report
- ++ Data unavailable due to State database transition.
- +++ Data pending

	Disease	April		May		June		Year to Date	
		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
VACCINE PREVENTABLE DISEASES	Chicken Pox (7)	7	0	7	1	3	1	23	9
	Measles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mumps	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Pertussis	1	0	3	0	2	0	7	0
	Rubella	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ENTERIC DISEASES	Campylobacteriosis	0	5	1	2	3	5	6	15
	Clostridium Perfringes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	E. Coli	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Giardiasis	2	1	7	3	3	1	27	8
	Hepatitis A	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	1
	Salmonellosis (6)	0	4	4	13 +	1	15	11	39
	Shigellosis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Typhoid Fever	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES	Chlamydia	75	79	70	85	80	98	470	530
	Gonorrhea	14	15	9	16	22	14	98	73
	Infectious Syphilis	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
	Congenital Syphilis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Granuloma Inguinale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	Disease	April		May		June		Year to Date	
		2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
REPORTED DISEASES AND / OR CONDITIONS	AIDS Erie County Residents (2)	0	4 +	1	1	1	0	6	9
	Amebiasis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Animal Bites	73	87	81	78	93	140	389	458
	Arboviruses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Childhood Lead Poisoning (\geq 15 mcg/dl)	2	2	1	4	3	0	9	10
	Creutzfeldt – Jacobs Disease (syndrome)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
	Cryptosporidium	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Encephalitis	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
	Guillain Barre	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
	Haemophilus Influenzae Type B	2	0	0	0	1	0	4	2
	Hepatitis B – acute (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Hepatitis B – chronic (5) (2)	1	0	1	1	2	1	6	6
	Hepatitis C – acute (2)	3	0	1	1	0	0	6	1
	Hepatitis C – chronic (5) (2)	18	14	26	22 +	18	13	109	110
	Histoplasmosis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Influenza (3) (4)	17	4	8	0	15	0	457	8
	Legionellosis	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
	Leptospirosis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Listeriosis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Lyme Disease	0	5	0	3 +	1	2	1	15
	Malaria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Meningitis, Aseptic (2)	0	0	0	1	2	0	5	3
	Meningitis, Other Bacterial	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0
	Meningococcal Disease	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q Fever	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Respiratory Syncytial Virus (4)	18	7	6	4	3	0	184	183
	RMSF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Staphylococcus aureus, Vancomycin-resistant (or intermediate) invasive disease	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Streptococcus invasive disease (group A)	0	2	1	0	1	0	4	5
	Streptococcus pneumoniae, drug-resistant invasive disease (2)	3	2	5	0	1	0	14	4
	Streptococcus Toxic Shock (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Toxic Shock Syndrome (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Toxoplasmosis	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
	Tuberculosis Disease	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	4
	Tuberculosis Infection	15	24	13	48	20	+++	71	+++
	West Nile (encephalitis)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Nile (fever)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Yersinia	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	