

# A Healthy Comm - Unity is a Viable Comm - Unity

## What Do Flu and Joy Have in Common? They are Both Contagious.

by Susan Corrado



There's a lot in the press right now about H1N1 and how it is infecting people around the world, especially in Mexico. What is it and should we be worried? According to the Centers for Disease Control, Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a virus that causes regular outbreaks of a respiratory disease in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can happen and spreads from person-to-person. It is spread mainly through coughing and sneezing by infected people and can infect others from 1 day before symptoms occur through 7 or more days afterwards.

To minimize your risk of catching it, you should wash your hands, Try to stay in good general health. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Try not touch surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work

or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

It strikes me that just as we want to stop the spread of things like the Flu virus, we want to encourage the spread of things like people supporting and encouraging one another, holding each other accountable, sharing information, and creating a sense of community. The good feelings that come from these things are infectious, it starts with a few and ends up with many people feeling good.

How to maximize your risk of catching joy is almost the opposite of minimizing the risk of catching the Flu! Hold hands and reach out to others. Try to stay in good health. Keep in close contact with those who inspire you. Participate in things where positive people are present. If you can encourage and "breathe life into someone", pass it on. This way hopefully the Flu will pass and the joy will last!

*Susan Corrado is the Parish Community Nurse, and can be reached at the Wellness Center at 274-7006.*

## Get the Facts about Meningitis

by Jeff Golden, Dane Co Public Health

The second reported death due to meningitis has generated both strong media coverage and public concern. Public Health Madison and Dane County (PHMDC) nurses are actively investigating the recent death of the Mt. Horeb student to identify all people who had close contact with the student. Those people will be advised to get specific antibiotic treatment to help prevent further infections.

While bacterial meningitis is a very serious disease, it is relatively rare and its occurrences can be random and unexpected.

Bacterial meningitis is an inflammation of the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by one of several different bacteria. The bacteria that caused the two recent Dane County fatalities was *Neisseria meningitidis*.

Symptoms can appear quickly over a day or two. Most often, symptoms occur within 3 to 4 days of exposure, but as early as 2 and as late as 10 days after exposure. Early symptoms can include: high fever, headache, nausea and vomiting, followed later by: stiff neck, sleepiness, confusion, seizures, and unconsciousness.

The symptoms in infants are somewhat more difficult to assess, but the ill infant can be lethargic, irritable or have feeding problems, including vomiting.

Once infected with meningococcal meningitis, the disease may prove fatal to as many as 15% of those affected.

### Who is at risk to get the disease?

While many people carry the meningococcal bacteria in their nose and throat (up to 5-10% of the population can carry this bacterium at any time), it is not well understood why only some of these people are susceptible to this disease. There may be a variety of immune system problems, physical factors, or other underlying illness that leads to the development of the disease.

To reduce one's risk, anyone who has had close/intimate contact with the ill person within the week previous to the onset of illness should receive preventive treatment as soon as possible. Treatment consists of one of several antibiotics designed to stop any infection.

### What constitutes close and intimate contact?

- Immediate household members
- Individuals with whom the ill person has shared eating utensils, shared drinking cups or glasses, eaten out of the same dish or bowl
- Persons who have been kissed by the ill person

Individuals who are close contacts should monitor themselves for signs of illness, particularly fever, and seek medical care promptly if these symptoms appear. Other individuals who are not sure if their exposure requires preventive treatment should contact the PHMDC Communicable Disease Intake Nurse at 266-4821.

**What about others who may have had less close contact such as in school?** People who may have had less close contact with an infected person, such as contact in school or at a shopping mall, are not considered to be at risk and do not require preventive treatment.

**How Can Meningitis Be Prevented?** A vaccine is available to protect against several of the strains of meningococcal meningitis. While the vaccine does not provide protection against all forms of the disease, it does cover most strains. Since it takes between 7 to 10 days for the vaccine to provide immunity, the vaccine cannot substitute for preventive antibiotic treatment of close contacts and is not approved for such use. It may however be given at the same time as the treatment.

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