

The Quarterly Infectious Disease Newsletter from Tri-County Health Department

Disease Highlight: Wound Botulism Linked to Black Tar Heroin Use

Tri-County Health Department investigated a case of wound botulism in an individual who reported black tar heroin use. Wound botulism is a rare and life-threatening illness with symptoms that can include drooping eyelids, blurred or double vision, difficulty swallowing, slurred speech, muscle weakness, difficulty breathing, and descending paralysis.



Most cases of wound botulism in the United States occur in individuals who inject black tar heroin contaminated with the *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria. People who inject subcutaneously (“skin popping”) or intramuscularly (“muscling”) are at higher risk. This is Colorado’s second case of wound botulism since June 2016. Before 2016, the last case of wound botulism associated with black tar heroin use in Colorado was in 1999.

It is not known if other heroin products in CO are contaminated. To reduce the risk of wound botulism, individuals who inject black tar heroin should be counseled on the following:

- If possible, stop all drug use. Note: Be supportive of patients who are ready to look at their treatment options.
- Snorting or smoking drugs can be a safer alternative to injecting.
- People who inject heroin should monitor themselves for the above symptoms and seek care immediately if they develop.
- Patients who report injection drug use should be referred to a syringe access program. Check www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/reducing-infections-injection-drug-use for the closest program.

Providers should immediately report suspect botulism cases to CDPHE by calling 303-692-2700 or 303-370-9395.

Seasonal Bits: FOOD SAFETY

The holidays are time for friends, family, food, and...gastrointestinal illness. Foodborne pathogens can be commonly associated with foods prepared at home. Turkeys, roasts, hams, and other meats are a vehicle for bacterial contamination if not cooked fully to at least 165 degrees. For more information on foodborne illness and food safety tips, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/>

Influenza Update: It is looking like this will be a bad year for flu in Colorado and it’s not too late to get vaccinated! Statewide, we’ve already had 15 influenza outbreaks (3 within TCHD’s jurisdiction), as well as 438 hospitalizations, both greater than what we saw last year. For more information: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/>

Travel Health:

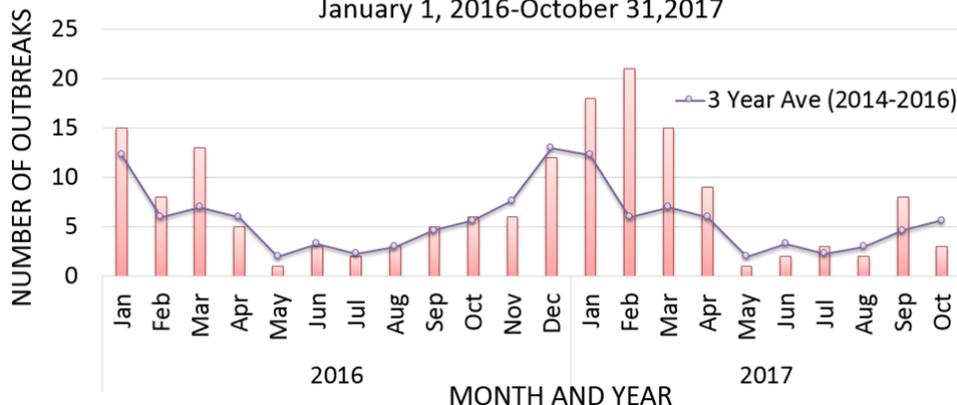


While travel can be exciting, some travelers return home with souvenirs. Approximately 8 percent of travelers are ill enough to seek medical care. Most post-travel infections appear shortly after travel but some may present months later, such as malaria. Some of these illnesses may be prevented by getting vaccinated prior to travel or taking preventative medication while traveling.

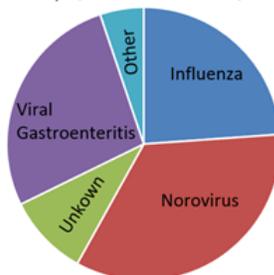
If traveling internationally, MMR is recommended for children at 6 months of age (instead of 12 months of age) and older. For more information about travel health go to: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list>.

Outbreaks are common in winter months due to flu and norovirus

Outbreaks Investigated by Tri-County Health Department
January 1, 2016-October 31, 2017



Etiology of Outbreaks (n=155)
January 1, 2016-October 31, 2017



Contact Information

To report suspect outbreaks or reportable conditions to Tri-County Health Department:
Call Communicable Disease at (303) 220-9200
After hours: (303) 461-2342

<http://www.tchd.org/171/Infectious-Diseases>