

Health Advisory #209 - COMMUNICABLE DISEASE AND ANIMAL EXPOSURE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR PHYSICIANS - 08/27/2007

SUMMARY

- Physicians are required to report selected communicable diseases and animal exposures to the local health department under New York State Sanitary Code (10NYCRR 2.10).
- Mandatory laboratory reporting does not negate the physician reporting requirement.
- Suspected or confirmed cases of reportable communicable diseases should be promptly reported to the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH).
- All dog bites, cat bites, and exposures to potentially rabid animals must be promptly reported to the ECDOH.

BACKGROUND

Prompt and complete physician reporting of communicable diseases is critical for disease control activities and outbreak prevention. Healthcare providers (including physicians, nurse practitioners, physicians' assistants, and nurses), healthcare facilities, laboratories, and local and State health departments all share the responsibility for reporting, follow-up, and control of communicable diseases.

Physicians are required to report selected communicable diseases, including confirmed cases, suspected cases and certain carriers to the local health department under New York State Sanitary Code (10NYCRR 2.10). Mandatory laboratory reporting does not negate the physician reporting requirement.

WHY REPORT

Timely communicable disease reporting by physicians allows public health agencies at the local, state and federal levels to detect outbreaks, prevent secondary transmission, identify newly emerging infections, and evaluate the effectiveness of control measures. ECDOH can assist physicians with accessing the appropriate laboratory tests to confirm suspected cases of communicable diseases.

For some diseases, every hour can make a difference in preventing additional illness and death. Laboratories only report positive test results. However, laboratory results may sometimes be negative when disease is present or suspected (i.e., false negative). Therefore, the physician's report of suspected/confirmed cases may be the only notification the health department receives.

WHAT TO REPORT

Communicable diseases: An updated list of the reportable communicable diseases mandated under New York State Sanitary Code is attached, and can be found at http://www.erie.gov/health/offices/disease_control.asp. Suspected or confirmed cases of the diseases shown in bold print must be reported immediately by phone to the local health department in which the patient resides. Diseases not in bold print must be reported by phone, mail, fax or other electronic means to the local health department where the patient resides within 24 hours of diagnosis. Case reports should include the name, address, diagnosis, age, gender, antibiotic treatment, if applicable, date of report and symptom onset for each patient.

Animal Exposures: All dog bites, cat bites, and exposures to potentially rabid animals (e.g., bat in a bedroom or "adopted" wild raccoon) should be reported to the local health department in which the patient resides regardless of whether the animal was or was not known to the patient. When calling ECDOH to report a dog bite, cat bite or animal exposure, the caller will be referred to the appropriate environmental health district office so that an investigation can be promptly initiated.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE REPORTING AND HIPAA

Reporting of communicable diseases to local or state health departments, as required by law, is permitted under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Providers do not need patient consent before sending this information to the health departments.

REPORTING

Communicable disease reporting forms are attached and can also be downloaded at:

http://www.erie.gov/health/offices/disease_control.asp

Communicable diseases among Erie County residents should be reported promptly to the ECDOH Epidemiology and Surveillance program by phone, fax or mail.

Phone: (716) 858-7697

Fax: (716) 858-7964

After-Hours Emergency: (716) 961-7898

Mail: Erie County Department of Health

Attn: Epidemiology, Room 978

95 Franklin St

Buffalo, NY 14202

Physicians and clinical administrators may designate key staff responsible for the reporting of communicable diseases. Incorporating reporting procedures into routine clinical practice will ensure timely and complete reporting. It is not necessary for physicians to personally report to the health department. The ECDOH can assist physicians interested in developing a reporting system within their practice or clinical department.