

**2008 – THE YEAR IN DISEASES**

Did your child get the measles, chicken pox or whooping cough this year? Did you or someone you know suffer from tuberculosis, hepatitis A or West Nile virus? You may be one of thousands of San Diego County residents impacted by infectious disease in 2008.

| 2008 REPORTABLE STATISTICS – SAN DIEGO COUNTY 2008 statistics are to-date and will be finalized in early 2009 | | |
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| Disease | 2008 Cases | 2007 Cases |
| Chicken Pox (reportable by cluster and hospitalization) | 118 cases (13 clusters) 6 hospitalized cases Total: 124 cases | 81 cases (8 clusters) 6 hospitalized cases Total: 87 cases |
| Hepatitis A | 67 (includes 22 from restaurant outbreak) | 82 |
| Measles | 12 | 0 |
| Severe Staph (includes MRSA) | 21 | Not reportable before 2008 |
| Tuberculosis | 260-270 | 280 |
| West Nile virus | 35 | 15 |
| Whooping Cough | 51 | 50 |

Protecting your health is a priority for the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHS). HHS's Public Health Services in 2008 met several health challenges, including a significant measles outbreak that garnered national attention from the medical community and the media. The measles outbreak in February – which sickened 12 children – marked the first time in more than 15 years that the county has seen more than a few cases. The incident illustrated how a disease held at bay for years by vaccination can reappear and have serious repercussions.

The outbreak originated with a seven-year-old child who returned from a visit to Europe with the measles. The parents had chosen not to vaccinate their child. Other children who were not vaccinated – some too young to receive the vaccine – fell ill as a result of contact or close proximity to the infected child.

“County residents learned about the ‘ripple effect’ of one child not being inoculated against disease,” said Wilma Wooten, M.D., M.P.H., County of San Diego Public Health Officer.

“Hundreds of people were impacted by the outbreak simply because they were exposed to an infected child at a public event. It’s that easy to catch the measles – but we know that vaccination gives children and adults a fighting chance to prevent this and other potentially dangerous diseases,” added Wooten.

Another high-profile vaccine-preventable incident took place in April and May 2008, when 22 people were sickened with hepatitis A that was reportedly linked to a restaurant. This food-borne illness is found in the stool of infected persons, and can be spread by close personal contact, and sometimes

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eating food and drinking water that have been contaminated.

HHSA's Public Health Services and the County Department of Environmental Health investigated the outbreak, but the source of infection was never confirmed.

"The infected food may have been consumed, or thrown away, as sometimes happens with investigations of food-borne illness," said Wooten. "It's a reminder that the public should ask their physician about the hepatitis A vaccination series."

Every year, the chicken pox and whooping cough make their presence known at local schools. Easily spread among groups of children, both diseases also may be prevented or lessened with vaccines. So far in 2008, there have been 13 reported outbreaks of chicken pox (compared to eight in 2007) and 51 reported cases of whooping cough, nearly the same as 2007.

Why should you be concerned about these diseases? Many remember measles, chicken pox and whooping cough as childhood diseases that cause temporary discomfort, with little or no long-term physical consequences. Unfortunately, the impact of these diseases is far more severe for some individuals.

"Today, disease respects no borders," said Karen Waters-Montijo, M.P.H., chief of the HHSA Immunizations Branch. "Due to air travel, disease can hitch a ride anywhere, anytime, without a passport. Also, many people have diseases that affect their immune systems – they are vulnerable to other diseases. The very young and elderly are always more susceptible to disease.

"Get vaccinated to protect not only yourself, but your family, friends ... the entire community."

Some diseases that affected San Diego County residents are not preventable with a vaccine, such as West Nile virus (WNV). California led the nation with over 400 cases of the mosquito-borne WNV this year, with a record 35 cases reported in San Diego County. HHSA Public Health Services worked in partnership with County's Department of Environmental Health to spread the message that there are things the public can do to avoid WNV, such as removing sources of standing water where mosquitoes can breed, and wearing long sleeves and pants when outdoors where mosquitoes are present.

"No one knows exactly why we saw so many cases of West Nile virus this year," Dr. Wooten said. "However, there was a dramatic increase in the number of neglected 'green' swimming pools identified at foreclosed homes. These pools provided perfect breeding conditions for mosquitoes right in our backyards. West Nile virus is here to stay in our community."

Another disease not preventable by vaccine is tuberculosis. The good news on the tuberculosis front: cases appear to be on the wane. Though numbers for 2008 are not yet complete, they appear to

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be less than the 280 cases reported last year.

“We’ve worked hard to educate the public about tuberculosis and we continue to partner closely with health officials in Mexico to track the disease,” said Kathleen Moser, M.D., chief, HHS’s Tuberculosis Control Branch. “We want the public to know that tuberculosis is treatable, and that it’s critical that they complete their treatment regimen if they have the disease.”

An emerging concern, also not preventable by vaccine, is severe staph infection, including MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus), which starts as a pimple or boil and can cause serious infections. Recently, the State of California Department of Public Health decided to make severe staph infection a reportable disease in cases when the patient is hospitalized, or dies from the infection. There have been 21 cases in San Diego County since the disease became reportable in February 2008.

These are just a few of the dozens of infectious diseases tracked by the County Health and Human Services Agency, which also works to educate the public on infectious disease prevention. What diseases will make the rounds in 2009? HHS hopes the public will take prevention into their own hands by staying informed and staying healthy.

- For information on vaccination, contact the HHS Immunizations Branch at (619) 692-8661 or visit www.sdiz.org.
- For information on tuberculosis, contact the HHS Tuberculosis Control Branch at (619) 692-5668 or visit <http://www2.sdcounty.ca.gov/hhsa/> keyword: TB.
- For information on West Nile virus, call (858) 694-2888 or visit www.sdfightthebite.com.
- For information on severe staph infection and MRSA, go to <http://www2.sdcounty.ca.gov/hhsa/> keyword: MRSA.
- For information on all reportable diseases and conditions, go to <http://www2.sdcounty.ca.gov/hhsa/> keywords: Reportable Diseases and Conditions.

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