

Medical News

EDITED BY GINA PUGLIESE, RN, MS

Eating on the Wards Responsible for Hepatitis A Outbreak Among Healthcare Workers

In the first nosocomial outbreak of hepatitis A in a burn treatment center, Dr. Bradley Doebbling et al from the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics reported 11 healthcare workers and one burn patient (secondary case) developed hepatitis A after the admission of a man and his 8-month-old son to the burn unit with acute hepatitis A.¹ A case-control study implicated the behavior of eating on the hospital ward as the single most important risk factor for infection. Healthcare workers assigned to the burn treatment center often ate in the staff lounge or charting area (15 to 50 feet from the patient rooms). Staff food was stored in a refrigerator in a designated staff food room, the staff lounge, or occasionally in the patient nourishment room. Infants and young children with burns were allowed to eat beside the desks in the center of the unit. Also, outpatients with burns were seen routinely on the ward and often bring snack foods to share with burn treatment personnel.

The authors noted that their finding of eating on the wards being clearly associated with hepatitis A infection is entirely consistent with the fecal-oral route of transmission of hepatitis A infection. Based on staff estimates, compliance with handwashing and use of gloves were suboptimal. The authors speculate that the mode of transmission was hand contamination after providing hydrotherapy; subsequent infection occurred either from eating snacks or sharing food on the ward.

Recent data have demonstrated that hepatitis A virus survives well on the finger-pads, despite drying, for 4 hours.² Additionally, the virus can be transferred effectively between finger-pads and from finger-pads to clean surfaces despite prolonged drying.

Previous outbreaks of hepatitis A have been linked to sharing food with patients or families, drinking coffee at work, and smoking, suggesting the importance of fecal-oral route of transmission.

REFERENCES

1. Doebbling BN, et al. An outbreak of hepatitis A among health care workers: risk factors for transmission. *Am J Public Health*

1993;83:1679-1684.

2. Mbithi JN, et al. Survival of hepatitis A virus on human hands and its transfer on contact with animate and inanimate surfaces. *J Clin Microbiol* 1992;30:757-763.

OSHA Announces Timetable for TB Standard

March 1995 is the date that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has announced for completion of a proposed standard on occupational transmission of tuberculosis (TB). Following publication of the proposed rule in the *Federal Register*, the rulemaking process will include public hearings and an opportunity for submitting written comments. OSHA has indicated that it will not wait for the revision of the 1990 CDC guidelines for TB control in healthcare facilities before moving forward with a TB standard.

FROM: *Federal Register* April 25, 1994;20643.

AHA- Sponsored Teleconference to Cover TB Controls and OSHA Compliance

The American Hospital Association (AHA) will broadcast a teleconference on July 21, 1994, from 1:30 to 2:30 P.M. (EDT) on "Hospital Controls for Tuberculosis: OSHA's Role." The teleconference will focus on current engineering technology to control the spread of TB and OSHA's role in healthcare facility inspections. Faculty will include Dr. James L. Cook, head of the Infectious Disease Division at the National Jewish Center for Immunology, Denver; Ruth McCully, Director of OSHA's Office of Health Compliance; Gina Pugliese, AHA's Director of Infection Control; and Andrew Striefel, an environmental health specialist with the University of Minnesota. For information on viewing the broadcast, call (800) 999-4242.

Guidelines for New or Remodeled Healthcare Facilities Being Revised

The American Institute of Architects (AIA)