Infectious Diseases

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Infectious Diarrhea Pathogens

Lurk at Petting Zoos, Pools

BY SHERRY BOSCHERT
San Francisco Bureau

San Francisco — Go beyond the usual questions about travel to other countries, when asking parents about potential environmental exposures to diarrhea-causing agents, Dr. Sarah S. Long advised. Ask about two increasingly recognized sources of infection—children and swimming pools, said Dr. Long, chief of infectious diseases at St. Christopher’s Hospital for Children, Philadelphia.

Agricultural fairs, petting zoos, and their equivalents are prime grounds for enteric pathogens that can cause acute and often bloody diarrhea, especially in children younger than age 3 years who carry pacifiers, bottles, or toys in the vicinity of animals.

“I don’t think we spend enough time asking about whether they’re traveling to places where there are animals,” Dr. Long said at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Whether someone brings animals to a day care center or a family visits a local 4-H fair, the transient nature of most petting zoos usually trumps poor hygiene. They often feature high-risk animals such as baby chicks, which harbor Salmonella species, or neonatal calves, which can transmit E. coli. Children under age 5 years should not be allowed to touch these animals, she said.

Advise parents that they take their children to these environments, bring nothing that a child might put in his or her mouth, and avoid eating food prepared there if possible. Most importantly, everyone should use hand sanitizer when leaving, whether they touched anything or not.

The summer of 2007 saw 400 cases of Cryptosporidium associated with swimming and diarrhea from an outbreak of infections around swimming pools in Philadelphia. Cryptosporidium species can also be transmitted in day care centers and from farm animal contacts.

This protozoan is very chlorine resistant and remains in the stool of infected people for about 2 weeks after the diarrhea stops, unlike other agents that cause acute diarrhea. “We did anticipate treatment of an awful lot of children” this past summer, Dr. Long said.

Routine tests for ova and parasites will not detect Cryptosporidium. “You want to ask about swimming pools,” and order specific antigen detection on stool specimens for children suspected of Cryptosporidium treatment.

With 3 days of nitazoxanide is approved for children aged 1 year or older.

To prevent this infection, advise parents of all young children not to change diapers at pools. A child who may have become infected in the pool should be checked frequently and wash up. Anyone with a diarrheal illness should be checked frequently and wash up. Anyone with a diarrheal illness for about 2 weeks and hyperchlorinated. Cryptosporidium was isolated from 5 of 6 pool samples and 1 of 7 samples collected from 5 of 6 pool samples and 1 of 7 samples collected from children who had become ill.

In a study of 46 hospital patients undergoing Cryptosporidium stool testing, 29 (62.2%) were found to be infected with Cryptosporidium species.

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