

MAVERICK HEALTH

A newsletter dedicated to student health at Minnesota State University, Mankato

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Acetaminophen Overdose Leads to Liver Failure, Death



Despite warnings on labels and years of research, the number of unintentional acetaminophen poisonings is on the increase. Acetaminophen, best known by the brand name Tylenol, is a common pain reliever and is found in many over-the-counter and prescription drugs. A recent study by researchers at the University of Washington Medical Center in Seattle reported a significant increase in the number of acetaminophen poisonings that led to liver failure. Current labels on products containing acetaminophen warn of the dangers of combining acetaminophen with alcohol but the University of Washington research found that liver failure also occurred in those who had taken acetaminophen and were fasting, or had not been eating enough due to an illness like the stomach flu. Acetaminophen is considered safe when taken according to package directions. The maximum dose recommended for adults is four grams spread across 24 hours (this would be eight Extra Strength Tylenol). Acetaminophen is found in over-the-counter drugs like Excedrin, Midol, Theraflu, Alka-Seltzer Plus Cold, and Ny-Quil Cold and Flu. It is also with prescription drugs such as Vicodin and Percoset.

Avian Influenza...Should College Students Be Concerned?

Avian influenza, sometimes called bird flu, has been making frequent news headlines lately. But is a disease that normally infects only birds something college students need to be concerned about? With studying for exams, writing papers and completing class projects, many students just don't have the time (or the desire!) to add one more "worry" to the list. According to the World Health Organization, everyone can benefit from learning more about Avian influenza and many infectious disease experts view a specific type of avian virus now causing disease in birds to be a likely source of the next influenza pandemic in people.

Avian influenza in humans is caused by a virus that normally infects birds. Two main forms of the virus exist: one form causing mild symptoms in infected birds and another form that can produce severe disease and significant numbers of bird death. It is the second form of avian flu virus, called the H5N1 virus, that has health experts concerned. At this point, most cases of H5N1 influenza have been transmitted from birds to human through direct contact with infected poultry, or surfaces and objects contaminated by bird feces. Approximately 100 human cases of influenza caused by the H5N1 virus have been documented in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Rarely, it has been transmitted human to human.

So...if this is a virus that primarily affects birds, has only caused about 100 cases with the current outbreak, and isn't easily transmitted human-to-human, why worry? Experts feel that the current level of infection in birds, increased cases in humans, and the high mortality rate in infected humans (over 50% of those infected have died) indicates the potential for an influenza pandemic. The World Health Organization lists three conditions that allow a pandemic to occur: a new influenza subtype emerges; it infects humans, causing serious illness; and it spreads easily and sustainably among humans. The H5N1 virus has already met the first two conditions. The last influenza pandemic that occurred ("Hong Kong flu") caused about 34,000 deaths in the United States. The influenza pandemic of 1918-19 killed more than 500,000 people in the U.S. and more than 50 million people worldwide. Nearly half of those who died were young, healthy adults.

Currently, no vaccine exists that could provide protection from the strain of influenza caused by H5N1 and inadequate amounts of antiviral medications make it unlikely that treatment after exposure will be possible. Measures that are used to prevent the spread of seasonal influenza and colds are currently available for all to use and could go a long way to slow down a potential influenza pandemic. The Centers for Disease control recommends the following:

- Avoid close contact with others and stay home when you're sick
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing
- Wash your hands frequently
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth

The following web sites offer additional information about avian flu:

www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/

www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>



Makers of Birth Control Patch issue updated warning



Ortho-McNeil Pharmaceutical, the makers of the Evra birth control patch announced a change in the prescribing information provided with the patch following FDA approval of the changes.

The changes reflect newly released information about the hormone level differences between women using birth control pills and the patch: "Hormones from patches applied to the skin get into the blood stream and are removed from the body differently than hormones from birth control pills taken by mouth. You will be exposed to about 60% more estrogen if you use ORTHO EVRA than if you use a typical birth control pill containing 35 micrograms of estrogen. In general, increased estrogen exposure may increase the risk of side effects. However, it is not known if there are differences in the risk of serious side effects based on the differences between ORTHO EVRA and a birth control pill containing 35 micrograms of estrogen."

This change in prescribing information occurred after The Associated Press reported that patch users die and suffer blood clots at a rate three times higher than women taking the pill. Cigarette smoking increases the risk of cardiovascular incidents, such as strokes and heart attacks, so women using birth control pills, Evra birth control patch and NuvaRing are urged to not smoke. If you are currently using the Evra birth control patch and have concerns, consult your health care provider.

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Smart Snacking

For many students, snacking is a nutrition reality. Pauline Genter, Registered Dietitian and nutrition Health Educator with Student Health Services, offers the following, "Snacking can be a healthy way to get a boost of energy between meals if chosen carefully. Snacks may help you from becoming too hungry during the day and prevent overeating and sweet cravings later on. However, for most Americans, snacking has become a habit that adds extra calories without much nutritional benefit when the "munchies" are candy bars, chips, cookies and soft drinks." For students looking to snack sensibly, Genter offer the following tips:

Choose snacks that add to your nutrition needs for the day. Smart choices are fruits, vegetables, milk products and whole grains.

Listen to your body cues and don't snack unless you are hungry. Avoid nibbling when you are bored, tired or stressed—instead go for a brisk 10 minute walk.

Eat "snack size" portions. Snacks are not meant to be extra meals. Small portions of food should be enough to relieve your hunger pangs and hold you until mealtime. If you do eat a large snack, adjust your meal size accordingly.

Balance your snack calories with your activity level. Remember your math: calories eaten should equal calories expended. Very physically active persons can eat larger snacks more often than couch potatoes.

Avoid snacking when sitting in front of the TV or computer. Make snacking a conscious activity to prevent overeating. Portion out your snack on a plate, eat slowly and deliberately and stop when you are full.

Be prepared for snack attacks. Keep tasty, nutritious foods on hand at home, at work and in the car. You will be more likely to skip the fast food drive thru, vending machine or convenience store the next time hunger strikes.

Enjoy your food. We are lucky to have a wide variety of delicious foods available day and night. An occasional cookie, soft drink, ice cream or bag of chips is okay—just make trade offs to keep your snacks and meals in balance.



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