Statement from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CDC is always concerned when children become ill and the causes aren't always clear. We have talked with the California Department of Public Health about the cases of acute paralytic disease in children in the state, and we are following the situation closely. At this time, CDC does not think the situation in California poses a public health threat, but we encourage parents to speak with their doctors or pediatricians if they have concerns. Considering the minimum expected rate of acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) cases in the population annually, the number of cases reported to be under investigation by California Department of Public Health are well within the expected rate.

Among children under 15 years of age, in the absence of polio, AFP typically occurs at a rate of at least 1 per 100,000 children annually. This is a WHO global standard for polio surveillance. Since there are 7.8 million children under 15 years of age in California, at least 78 cases of AFP are likely to occur each year in the state. AFP is not a nationally notifiable disease, so CDC is unable to assess the significance of the small numbers of cases reported by local and state health departments or speak on a national level.

CDC is aware of an abstract that has been submitted for presentation at an upcoming meeting. This abstract describes five cases of acute paralytic disease identified during a 12 month period. Two of the 5 cases reported were associated with detection of enterovirus 68 (EV68). Also, CDC is aware from the California Department of Public Health that additional AFP cases have been investigated over the past year.

Enteroviruses are very common. Each year in the United States, there are an estimated 10 to 15 million symptomatic enteroviral infections. Many people do not develop illnesses as a result of infection. Most people with symptomatic illness have mild illnesses, such as the common cold, diarrhea or conjunctivitis. Rarely, these viruses can

cause more severe illnesses, such as myocarditis, neonatal sepsis, severe respiratory disease, aseptic meningitis, encephalitis, and paralysis. A positive identification of an enterovirus in a non-sterile site, such as throat or stool specimen, may be an incidental finding.

EV68 is one type of more than 200 related viruses in the Picornavirus Family. It was first described in 1963 and infections occur worldwide. Reports over the last decade have routinely associated EV68 with respiratory disease, some of which can be severe. No specific associations of EV68 with paralytic disease have been reported. However, most enterovirus types including EV68 have, in rare instances, been detected from patients with AFP or severe neurological disease .

Links:

- Non-polio enteroviruses: http://www.cdc.gov/non-polio-enterovirus/index.html
- 2010 enterovirus MMWR: http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5948a2.htm.
- 2006 enterovirus MMWR: http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5508a1.htm.
- 2011 Clusters acute respiratory illnesses EV68: http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6038a1.htm

Benjamin N. Haynes
Senior Press Officer