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Understanding Ebola on board

Food for thought

Dear Seafarer,

Most of us have been exposed to some form of mild food poisoning or upset stomach, but imagine the consequences of a severe bout of salmonella or E.coli infection within the closed environment of a ship on the high seas. This edition of Health Watch will help re-enforce your knowledge of food hygiene and with the entering into force of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) in 2013, there is now a minimum standard – regulation 3.2 - food and catering – which ensures, among other things, that:

- + Catering staff are properly trained and training records available on board
- + Domestic fresh water supplies are adequate and fresh water tanks have a record of inspection
- + Food preparation and supply is adequate, including variety and consideration of culture and religious beliefs
- + Food storage arrangements are adequate and all galleys kept in hygienic condition

Previous editions of *Health Watch* have highlighted illnesses caused by poor diet and we make no apologies for expanding on this theme in this edition – you are what you eat. Of course, cooks on board Members' ships today are focused on providing healthy food that is nutritious and will help control high intake of fats, salt and sugar.

Finally we look at preventing the spread of common colds and flu on board ship and we also highlight the

threat of viral infections, epitomised by the serious outbreak of Ebola in West Africa.

IMO circular dated 2 September 2014 states; "Unlike infections such as flu, Ebola is not spread by breathing air (and the airborne particles it contains) from an infected person. Transmission requires direct contact with blood, secretions, organs or other body fluids of infected living or dead persons or animals, all unlikely exposures for seafarers, passengers and others on board ships in the normal course of their activities."

Of course it is essential that seafarers are educated about this viral infection, and the Club has a dedicated Focus section on the website for Ebola. This contains links to the World Health Organisation (WHO) website, the IMO circular quoted here, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, together with country and regional updates.

For seafarers trading on board ships visiting ports in the affected region, it is sensible to remain on board during such a visit to reduce the possibility of coming into contact with anyone carrying the virus. Seafarers are urged to read the advice on hygiene contained on the WHO website and a poster is enclosed highlighting some key messages about the Ebola outbreak.

If you have any questions or comments about any of the articles in this issue, please do not hesitate to contact us at the email address on the back cover.

Keep it clean

Germs can be spread in a number of ways but good hygiene can help prevent the spread of infectious diseases. If you are working in the galley on board follow these hygiene tips:

- + Clean work surfaces regularly with hot, soapy water or disinfectant
- + Wash hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and warm water, rinse well and dry
- + Make sure refrigerated food is kept between 0°C and 5°C and keep raw meat and poultry in covered containers
- + Wash chopping boards and utensils in hot, soapy water when you are finished with them and in between preparing raw and ready-to-eat food
- + Change or wash tea towels, sponges, aprons and dish cloths at least once a week
- + Use disinfectant and cleaning products specifically for use in the kitchen
- + Cook poultry, pork, burgers, sausages and kebabs until steaming hot, there is no pink meat left inside and juices run clear



Salmonella infection

Salmonella – the name of a group of bacteria – is one of the most common causes of food poisoning and usually symptoms last just a few days with most people getting better without treatment.

However, it can cause more serious illness in older adults, children and those with chronic diseases.



Where is it found?

- + Food – contaminated eggs, poultry, meat, unpasteurised milk or juice, cheese, contaminated raw fruits and vegetables, spices and nuts
- + Animals and their environments – particularly reptiles (snakes, turtles, lizards), amphibians (frogs), birds (baby chicks), pet food and treats

Symptoms

- + Diarrhoea
- + Fever
- + Abdominal cramps
- + Vomiting

Treatment

- + Most salmonella gastrointestinal infections usually resolve in 5-7 days and most do not require treatment other than upping fluid intake to replace those lost through vomiting and diarrhoea

Prevention

- + Cook foods to a safe internal temperature – use a meat thermometer to make sure foods are cooked properly – Salmonella is killed by cooking and pasteurisation
- + Separate cooked foods from ready-to-eat foods
- + Do not use utensils with cooked foods that were used on raw foods and do not put cooked foods on plates where raw foods once were, unless thoroughly cleaned in between
- + Chill foods quickly after serving and when transporting from one place to the next

E.coli infection

E.coli is the name of a type of bacteria that lives in your intestines. Most types are harmless although some can make you sick. The worst type can cause bloody diarrhoea and, more seriously, can cause kidney failure or even death. These problems are most likely to occur in children or adults with a weak immune system.

Where is it found?

- + E.coli infections are generally caused by eating contaminated food, drinking contaminated water or coming into contact with someone who is sick or with animals carrying the bacteria
- + Food can be contaminated with E.coli when animals are slaughtered or processed, even if precautions are taken

Symptoms

- + Nausea or vomiting
- + Severe abdominal cramps
- + Watery or bloody diarrhoea
- + Fatigue
- + Fever

Treatment

- + Adults infected with E.coli are typically infectious for a week or less and most cases usually get better without treatment in 5-10 days. Those with it are encouraged to drink plenty of fluids

Prevention

- + Keep cold foods below 4°C and hot foods at or above 60°C
- + Place raw meat in containers on the bottom of the refrigerator
- + Keep raw food away from other foods at all times
- + Wash fruit and vegetables before eating, clean counters and cutting boards and wash hands regularly.
- + Read labels, follow cooking and storage instructions
- + Wash all cooking utensils well in warm, soapy water
- + Refrigerate or freeze perishable food within two hours of cooking
- + Always reheat leftovers until steaming hot before eating



Gastroenteritis

Both salmonella and E.coli can cause gastroenteritis – an inflammation in your stomach or bowels – but you can get also get a gastroenteritis infection by a virus, parasites or by coming into contact with people with an infection.

Symptoms

- + Diarrhoea, which may contain blood or mucus, or be watery, greasy or frothy
- + Nausea or vomiting
- + Abdominal cramps and bloating
- + Loss of appetite
- + Fever

Treatment

- + You should stay away from others, if possible, for at least 48 hours
- + Drink plenty of fluids
- + Certain probiotics can help reduce the duration of diarrhoea
- + Most people recover within 10 days without treatment

Prevention

- + Wash soiled clothing or bed linen away from other laundry and at the highest temperature available (60°C or higher)
- + Clean the toilet with disinfectant
- + Wipe toilet seats, handles etc daily with hot water and disinfectant
- + Don't share towels and flannels
- + Don't prepare food for others



You are what you eat

Many common health complaints can usually be fixed with lifestyle changes and pharmacy remedies.

Diet is often a key factor and here are a few of the common conditions:

Gout

Gout is a condition where a chemical – uric acid – forms crystals in your joints. It comes from two places – body and diet – and is usually filtered through kidneys and gets passed in the urine. If the body produces too much uric acid, or fails to excrete it, crystals form and become concentrated in the joints and tendons – usually your big toe, though it can also affect feet and ankles, knees, hands, fingers, wrists and elbows.

Symptoms

- + Sudden severe pain
- + Swelling and tenderness around the area
- + Red and shiny skin around the area, which may peel later
- + Possibly a fever

Complications of gout

- + Kidney stones
- + Damage to your kidneys
- + Cardiovascular disease, such as heart attack and stroke, have also been linked to gout

Causes of gout

- + Nobody knows exactly why gout develops but one of the most common factors that increases the chance is excessive consumption of alcohol particularly beer because it is high in purines

- + It can also be associated with injury or surgical procedure, hospitalisation or periods of stress or can be a consequence of certain medications which affect the kidneys' ability to clear out the uric acid
- + Certain high-protein foods can also make the body produce too much uric acid triggering gout and a sudden change in diet and weight gain or loss can also be a trigger
- + An attack is usually treated by medication

If you are at risk for gout

- + Eat a low cholesterol, low fat diet
- + Avoid foods high in purines including shellfish and red wine
- + Slowly lose weight
- + Restrict your intake of alcohol, especially beer
- + Stay hydrated
- + Increase your intake of dairy products such as non-fat milk and yogurt
- + Avoid fructose



Diverticulitis

Diverticular disease is the result of the development of small pockets of tissue or sacs (diverticula) in the wall of the colon (large intestine). They are often present without causing symptoms – a condition called diverticulosis. When these bulges become inflamed or infected and cause abdominal pain and bloating, it is called diverticular disease and if they cause more severe pain and fever it is known as diverticulitis. Ageing and genetics are factors but the main risk factor is lack of fibre in the diet.

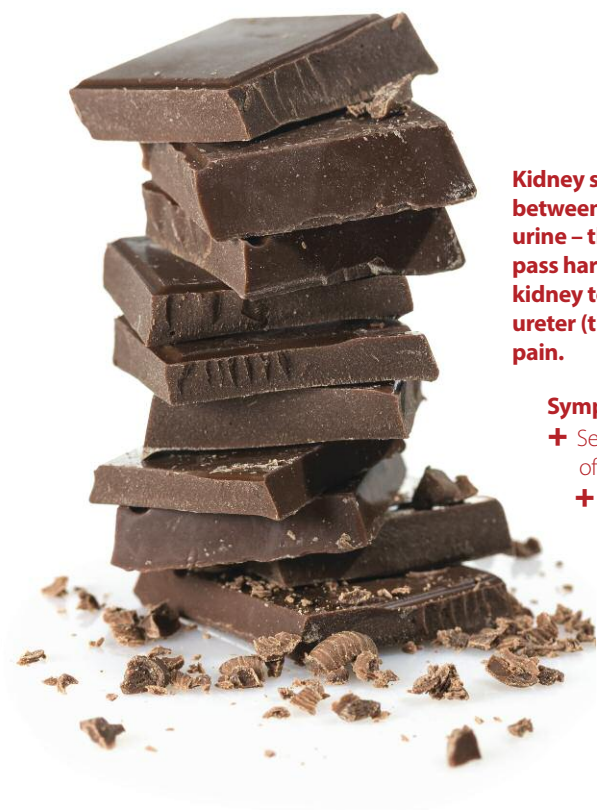
Symptoms

- + Severe cramping, abdominal pain (usually worse on left side)

- + Nausea
- + Chills or fever
- + Constipation, thin stools or diarrhoea
- + Rectal bleeding (rare)

Prevention

- + Eat a high-fibre diet that is low in fat and red meat
- + Drink plenty of water
- + Exercise regularly



Kidney stones

Kidney stones are common and usually affect people for the first time when they are aged between 20 and 50. They can form when there is an imbalance of salts or minerals in your urine – these minerals usually form into crystals which are often too small to notice and pass harmlessly out of your body. However, over time, they can build up inside your kidney to form a kidney stone. The stones can then move out of your kidney into your ureter (the tube that carries urine from your kidney to bladder) and this can cause severe pain.

Symptoms

- + Severe pain or ache on one or both sides of your back
- + Sudden spasms of severe pain, which usually start in the back below your ribs, goes around your abdomen and sometimes to your groin
 - + Blood in your urine
 - + Nausea or vomiting
 - + Needing to urinate often, or feeling a burning sensation during urination

Treatment

- + If the stone is small you can normally pass it in your urine – you will need to drink more fluids and may need pain relief

- + If there is an infection you will be prescribed antibiotics
- + For bigger stones, non-surgical or surgical removal may be necessary

Prevention

- + Increase the amount of water you drink

If you had a calcium stone

- + Don't eat more than 3g of salt per day
- + Cut down on foods that have high levels of oxalate such as chocolate, tea, rhubarb, spinach and nuts
- + Seek dietary advice to reduce foods containing uric acid
- + Don't take supplements containing calcium or Vitamins A, C and D

Take control

Salt

+ Too much salt can cause raised blood pressure which increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. You don't need to add extra extra salt to food as 75% of the salt we eat is already in everyday foods. Choose low salt foods and cook with less salt. Adults should eat no more than 6g of salt a day – around one full teaspoon



Fat

+ We all need some fat in our diet but too much of a particular kind – saturated fat – can raise cholesterol, which increases the risk of heart disease. Eating too much can also make you put on weight which raises your risk of type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, as well as heart disease

+ Fats that are good for us are unsaturated fats which can help lower cholesterol, such as omega-3 essential fatty acids, found in oily fish, nuts and seeds, sunflower and olive oils

Fats to cut down on

+ Saturated fat (found in foods such as meat products, butter, cheese, cream, biscuits, cakes and savoury snacks) – no more than 30g per day for men, 20g for women

+ Trans fats (found in foods such as baked goods, snacks and fried foods) – no more than 5g a day



Take your medicine!

Remember, you play a major role in looking after your own health – if you keep healthy and take care of yourself, this will mean fewer accidents and fewer days lost to illness.

Medical checks are so important and always remember that if you are given any medicines/prescriptions to treat an illness, you must remember to carry these medicines on board with you – don't leave them at home and remember to take your medicine!

After some time you may feel better but you shouldn't stop taking your medicine because it is helping you to manage your illness. Listen to the medical professionals and make sure that you follow their instructions properly.





Coughs and sneezes spread diseases!

The common cold

- + A cold can make you feel very unwell. The 'common cold' is something most adults experience, usually between 2 and 4 times a year. A cold is a viral infection which affects the throat, nose sinuses and upper airways. Symptoms include runny nose, sneezing, blocked nose, a cough, sore throat and these symptoms will usually last around one week
- + Although there are no real cures for a cold, you can take medication such as paracetamol and drinking lots of fluids will help you
- + You do not usually need to see a doctor for a cold but if your temperature gets higher than 39°C or if your symptoms persist for longer than 3 weeks, it is important to seek medical advice. If you experience symptoms such as coughing up blood, chest pains, swelling of glands in your neck or armpits, or you have breathing difficulties, this could mean you have a more serious infection and so it would then be important you see a doctor as soon as possible

Flu

- + Flu (short for influenza) is a common viral illness, spread through coughs and sneezes. It is caused by a different group of viruses to the common cold but sometimes the two illnesses can have similar symptoms
- + Flu can make you feel very unwell. You may have a high temperature, aches and pains, headache, feelings of tiredness and a sore throat. Flu can also make you lose your appetite and give you a cough or make you feel nauseous
- + Usually with flu there is no reason to go to the doctor – you may feel very unwell but it may be best to stay in bed until you feel better, keep warm and drink plenty of water to stay hydrated. You can also take paracetamol or ibuprofen to lower your temperature and to relieve your aches and pains

Stopping the spread

- + Colds and flu are spread through contact with fluid droplets containing a cold or flu virus. If someone with a cold or flu sneezes or coughs, droplets of this virus are launched into the air within their saliva and these droplets can be breathed in by others
- + Colds and flu can also be spread through indirect contact. For example, if you sneeze onto a surface, such as a door handle, and then someone else touches this surface, they can catch your cold if they then touch their mouth or nose
- + In order to prevent colds and flu from spreading, it is important to wash your hands regularly and properly, especially before and after handling food or before and after touching your mouth. Coughing and sneezing into tissues can also help to stop fluid droplets containing the virus from entering the air and infecting other people. Used tissues should be thrown away immediately afterwards and you should also always wash your hands after using a tissue to blow or wipe your nose. Cleaning surfaces often will also help to keep them free of germs and make the spread of infection less likely





Understanding Ebola on board

Ebola is a serious, often fatal virus for which there is currently no treatment or vaccine. The threat is more serious for those who live in Africa, where outbreaks have occurred in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. In your daily activities on board ship, you are unlikely to come into contact with Ebola but as a precaution it is important to be aware of the disease.

- + The biggest risk of contracting the Ebola virus is if you come into contact with an infected person or animal, particularly if you come into contact with their blood, body fluids or organs. This is unlikely to happen on board but familiarise yourself with the symptoms of the disease, as discussed on this page and if you experience any of these symptoms, seek medical help immediately
- + Unlike coughs and colds, the Ebola virus is not likely to be spread through airborne transmission
- + The risk of catching the disease is higher for people who are taking care of infected individuals, as this care may involve touching the infected person's body or cleaning up their bodily fluids such as urine, stools or vomit, as these fluids can contain infected blood
- + You can also catch Ebola by touching an infected person's soiled clothing, particularly if you then touch your mouth. Having sex with an infected person without using a condom is also risky because Ebola is present in semen and handling needles or medical equipment used in the care of an infected person is also a risky practice

Symptoms

- + Fever, joint and muscle pain, headache, sore throat, a rash and muscle weakness are typical symptoms. These symptoms are sudden and can occur anything between 2 and 21 days after becoming infected
- + These symptoms are followed by vomiting, diarrhoea, a rash, impaired kidney and liver function and stomach pain. After this point, the infected person will bleed internally and blood can come out of their eyes, ears, nose or mouth
- + If you believe you have been in contact with someone with Ebola

or if you are suffering from any of the symptoms, seek medical help immediately to improve your chances of survival

- + After infection, a person usually won't experience symptoms for between two and 21 days and an infected person is only contagious once they begin having symptoms

Caring for an Ebola patient

In the unlikely event that someone on board your ship becomes ill with Ebola, the person should be placed into isolation. When caring for the patient, follow these key pieces of advice:

- + Personal protective equipment (PPE) such as examination gloves, a medical mask and eye protection, rubber boots and a disposable impermeable long-sleeved gown should be worn to cover all clothing and exposed skin. This should be put on and removed very carefully to avoid cross contamination
- + Anyone caring for the patient must follow hand hygiene by thoroughly washing the hands in soap and water for one minute before and after wearing PPE and after any contact with the infected individual, their belongings or any contaminated surfaces
- + The patient should stay in the isolation room and not be moved elsewhere unless absolutely necessary, in which case during any transport they must wear a medical mask
- + Any linen or cloths, laundry or eating utensils used by the infected patient should all be collected and disinfected separately from those of other seafarers on board. Linen soiled with blood should be disposed of as hazardous waste
- + Any surfaces contaminated with the infected patient's blood should be cleaned and then treated with disinfectant for 30 minutes. PPE must be worn during this task. Cleaning cloths, along with any waste from the patient's room, should be disposed of as hazardous waste
- + Anyone who has come into close contact with the infected individual should monitor their own health as a precaution by taking their own temperature, twice a day for 21 days. A temperature of 100.4°F/38°C or higher could be a symptom of Ebola

Contact:

Tindall Riley (Britannia) Limited, Regis House, 45 King William Street, London, EC4R 9AN

Email: healthwatch@triley.co.uk Tel: +44 (0)20 7407 3588 Fax: +44 (0)20 7403 3942

www.britanniapandi.com