



The Diseases of Hurricane Katrina

By Marko Mijic



Among concerns of finding food, water, and shelter, many Hurricane Katrina victims were worried about the spread of diseases and the emotional strain of the situation as well. From tetanus and West Nile Virus to “emotional fallout” or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, government officials were extremely concerned with the spread of diseases in the high waters, which shattered many cities in the Gulf Coast.

On September 7, 2005 the Federal Government declared a public health emergency in the entire Gulf Coast region, due to the

floodwaters being contaminated with various toxins. It is clear that the clean up will take a great deal of time and many people will be affected for years to come. According to the article “Health Concerns in Katrina’s Aftermath” author Jennifer Bihm states that when U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt visited Mississippi, he reported an outbreak of amoebic dysentery, which is a disease that enters the body through contaminated food and water or even the contact with human feces. It was reported that the city of Biloxi in Mississippi had to close down a disaster shelter due to the outbreak. Amoebic dysentery, also known as amoebiasis, is the infection of the intestine caused by an amoeba called entamoeba histolytica, which most often causes severe diarrhea. Many times, individuals are infected with amoebic dysentery by drinking or eating food contaminated with the amoebae. Most of the amoebae travel



through the digestive system and take residence in the intestine, which causes an infection. Once the intestines are infected the amoebae generally travel throughout the bloodstream to infect other organs such as the liver, lungs, and even the brain. Although this vicious infection has affected the many victims of the recent Hurricanes, the U.S. Government is also concerned about other diseases such as the West Nile Virus. The many mosquitoes around the disaster areas are using the contaminated water as their breeding grounds.

The potential of disease outbreak from the fall hurricanes was a huge threat, but that was greatly narrowed with help from disease control specialists and immediate action to control the spread of harmful diseases.

