

Book Review

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Communicable Disease Control Handbook. Eds. J. Hawker, N. Begg, T. Blair, I. Reintjes and J. Weinberg. Blackwell Science, 2001. £29.95. ISBN 0-63205649-5.

To me a 'handbook' sounds like a volume that one would like to have close to hand as a source of information for unfamiliar situations. This multi-author book more than fulfils this role.

The handbook is organized in five sections. The first two sections are overly brief. The first supposedly covers basic epidemiology but devotes most page space to hand washing, perhaps in support of the renewed focus on hand washing as a vital part in preventing infection. The second section is syndrome based covering topics as varied as rash and fever in children and illness in returning travellers. Although each section gave useful clinical pointers none of them covered the syndromes in adequate clinical detail.

The third section is entitled 'Diseases' but is organized alphabetically by pathogens from amoebas to yersinia with an extra section on rare problems such as helminths, fungi, rare viruses and bioterrorism agents. Each pathogen is covered with sections on epidemiology, clinical features, laboratory confirmation, transmission, pathogenesis, prevention, surveillance, response to a case and investigation of

a cluster. The immediacy of infectious disease control is heightened by a box in each section highlighting 'On call action'. This section is impressive. It is wide ranging, thorough and gives advice that is clearly grounded in practical experience. Frequently it is advised that the outbreak plan should be consulted – one hopes that they are all there in place. This section is easy to use and gives instant guidance, focussing on the important actions needed. For meningococcal meningitis the advice relates to four areas, treatment of cases, laboratory investigation, chemoprophylaxis of contacts and the need to provide information for the local community.

The fourth section covers the administrative actions needed for effective infectious disease control with boxes on topics such as setting up an incident room and telephone helpline. The fifth section emphasizes the European aspects of infectious disease control with information on infectious disease surveillance in each EU member state.

This is a practical handbook, information is easy to access and the inside cover carries a list of useful websites. This book fulfils all the needs of a practical handbook, being easy to use and packed with practical information. I can imagine it being frequently consulted by all health professionals involved in infectious disease surveillance.

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