



New York State Department of Health Bureau of Emergency Medical Services

IMPORTANT ADVISORY AND UPDATE

Subject: Influenza Alert

Influenza Update

Current national information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that the United States is experiencing an early influenza (flu) season. The CDC suggests that this year's flu could be more severe than the previous three years. The majority of influenza viruses identified in the United States so far this winter have been type A(H3N2) viruses, which historically have been associated with more serious influenza epidemics. Over half of the counties in NYS have reported confirmed influenza, and over 20 reports of nosocomial, (in hospital infection) outbreaks in long-term care facilities have been received. Influenza activity in NYS is now classified as **"widespread."**

Although this year's flu vaccine is for the Panama strain of influenza A(H3n2), It is expected to provide some cross-protection against the Fujian-like viruses that are currently circulating.

Additional information on influenza activity in the United States is available in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5249a1.htm>.

Severe Illness in Pediatric Patients

In contrast to the 2002-2003 influenza season, which was relatively mild, the western states have already seen an early increase in influenza cases. This has increased the activity from pediatric facilities and schools reporting high absenteeism. ***Children appear to be particularly affected.*** Those seriously affected have also been reported to be previously healthy children.

EMS Preparation for Influenza Outbreaks

The Bureau of EMS is urging all EMS agencies to take measures that can help lessen the impact of a local flu outbreak in your community. The preplanning and procedures that agencies have undertaken for the possibility of the re-emergence

of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) will aid in the prevention of the transmission of all respiratory illness.

Planning suggestions include:

- Be on the alert for the occurrence of febrile respiratory illness with patients and/or employees.
- Ensure ill employees do not work until their illness resolves.
- Review requests for time off to ensure adequate staffing in the event of an outbreak occurring over this period, and consider methods to identify and mobilize additional staff.
- Instituting a “Respiratory Etiquette” program (see below)

Respiratory Etiquette Strategy

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Implement the use of surgical masks by healthcare personnel, during the evaluation of patients with respiratory symptoms.➤ Provide surgical masks to all patients with symptoms of a respiratory illness.➤ Provide instructions on the proper use and disposal of masks.➤ For patients who cannot wear a surgical mask in addition to any medical treatment being provided, provide tissues and instructions on when to use them (i.e., when coughing, sneezing, or controlling nasal secretions), how and where to dispose of them, and the importance of hand hygiene after handling this material.➤ Continue to use droplet precautions to manage patients with respiratory symptoms until it is determined that the cause of symptoms is not an infectious agent that requires precautions beyond standard precautions. |
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Additional Information

For complete recommendations, please refer to the NYSDOH's *Influenza Prevention and Control 2003-04* recommendations, which are available on the NYSDOH public web site at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/infection/fluguide.htm>. Review and provide your staff with **DOH Policy Statement 03-11**. As new information becomes available as the season progresses, we will keep you updated.

Consultation regarding control of nosocomial influenza outbreaks is available from NYSDOH epidemiologists located at the following regional offices:

Western Regional Office
(716) 847-4503

Capital District Regional Office
(518) 408-5396

Central New York Regional Office
Office
(315) 477-8166

Metropolitan Area Regional
Office
(914) 654-7149

Consultation for facilities located in New York City is available from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene at (212) 442-9050.