

For Health Professionals

Health Alerts

Health Alert Advisory #115 - Laboratory-Confirmed Influenza Added To NYS Reportable Disease List - December 2, 2004

PURPOSE

The purpose of this notification is to communicate new reporting requirements for influenza. Effective December 1, 2004, on an emergency basis, laboratory-confirmed influenza is added to the reportable disease list in New York State (Section 2.1 of the New York State Sanitary Code).

INTRODUCTION

Influenza is a common cause of respiratory illness in the United States during the months of October through May. Influenza illness results in significant morbidity and mortality yearly among the very young, the elderly, and those persons with chronic illness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates national mortality from influenza illness is approximately 36,000 deaths per year. Outbreaks of influenza in long-term care facilities and in communities can also challenge an already burdened healthcare system. A pandemic of influenza would have the capability to cause substantial illness and death, disruption of healthcare and other social services, and widespread panic. The yearly impact of influenza illness and the possibility of a pandemic give impetus for a sensitive influenza surveillance system for early detection of illness and implementation of control measures. Influenza is already reportable in 30 states.

The addition of laboratory-confirmed influenza to the list of reportable conditions in New York State will greatly enhance influenza reporting and surveillance efforts. The following new reporting requirements will result in local health departments and the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) having more comprehensive and complete information on influenza activity. This will enable us to quickly detect where influenza is occurring, as well as the specific strains that are circulating. With time, season-to-season comparisons of the number of cases and age groups reported by county and statewide can be done.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Laboratory-confirmed influenza:

At this time, positive influenza test result reporting is being asked only of laboratories that electronically submit files through the Electronic Clinical Laboratory Reporting System (ECLRS) using ASCII or HL7 formats and LOINC coding, since reporting by these laboratories is highly automated. Although some of these laboratories may need time to accommodate this request, it is important to monitor influenza activity during the current season and therefore these laboratories should begin reporting as soon as possible.

Laboratories that do not use the ECLRS reporting methods above may report positive influenza test results but at this time are not being asked to initiate reporting. Laboratories entering data directly into the ECLRS Web page may report influenza positive test results using the drop-down menu for reportable conditions. The ECLRS Help Desk (866-325-7743) is available to answer questions and assist laboratories using ECLRS or laboratories that would like to start reporting electronically.

At this time, medical providers do not need to report individual cases of influenza or submit a confidential case report (DOH-389) to the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) except for fatal pediatric influenza illness (see below).

Pediatric deaths due to confirmed or suspected influenza:

The NYSDOH is requiring reports of cases of fatal influenza illness in pediatric patients less than 18 years of age. Medical providers should report by telephone to the ECDOH (716-858-7967, Monday - Friday 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM) any pediatric death resulting from a clinically compatible illness. Laboratory testing for influenza A and B viral infection may be performed on pre- or post-mortem clinical specimens. The ECDOH can advise on appropriate laboratory testing and can facilitate referral of specimens as needed to NYSDOH Wadsworth Center Laboratory.

Weekly reporting of the number of patients hospitalized with laboratory-confirmed influenza:

Hospitals are required to report each Wednesday on the Hospital Emergency Response Data System (HERDS) for the previous week ending Saturday midnight the number of newly identified laboratory-confirmed influenza cases by age group among hospitalized patients. This should include both community-acquired and nosocomial cases of influenza. Patients should be reported only once when first diagnosed. The age groups are aggregated into the following categories: 0-23 months, 2 to 18 years, 19 to 64 years and >64 years. Reporting will be initiated Wednesday December 8, 2004, for the week starting Sunday November 28 and ending Saturday midnight December 4, 2004. Weekly reporting for the 2004-2005 influenza season will continue through May 2005. Additionally, a Health Care Facility Infection Control (Nosocomial) Report (DOH-4018) is to be submitted to the NYSDOH Infection Control Program by fax at (518) 474-7381 for nosocomial acquisition of influenza.

If you have questions regarding the information to report on HERDS, please contact the NYSDOH Regional Epidemiology and Infection Control Program at (518) 473-4439. If you have any technical difficulties accessing HERDS or entering the data, please contact Daniel Lena at (518) 473-1809, or John Kushner at (518) 408-5163.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance with this new reporting requirement. Questions related to the above reporting requirements should be directed to the ECDOH at (716-858-7967, Monday - Friday 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM).