



County of Erie

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Health Advisory #217

March 14, 2008

Influenza A Associated Death of an Erie County Pre-School Student

Please distribute to Emergency Departments, Infection Control Departments, Employee Health Services, Infectious Disease Departments, Pediatrics, Director of Nursing, Medical Director, Pharmacy, Laboratory Director and all patient care areas

SUMMARY

- A 4 year old diagnosed with encephalitis associated with influenza A (flu) infection died on Tuesday, March 11, 2008.
- The deceased attended the Jewish Community Center's Early Childhood Program in Getzville, NY and the Little Red Schoolhouse in Williamsville, NY.
- The estimated annual incidence of pediatric deaths due to influenza ranges from 44 to 153 per year in the United States.
- Annual influenza vaccination remains the best method for preventing influenza and its complications in children and adults even in years where there is a suboptimal match between vaccine and circulating strains of influenza viruses.
- Providers who need a supply of influenza vaccine to accommodate their patients, may contact the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) at (716) 858-7697.
- Providers may consider the use of influenza antiviral drugs as an important second line of defense to treat and prevent flu in high-risk populations in some settings.
- However after consultation with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), in this particular setting chemoprophylaxis for contacts of the deceased is not recommended for most individuals.
- Providers are encouraged to consider influenza in their differential of fever associated with headache, extreme fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion and muscle aches.

Background:

On Wednesday, March 12, 2008, the Erie County Department of Health was notified of the sudden death of a previously healthy pediatric patient. On the night of March 11, 2008, the patient was found unresponsive at home and was transported to a local hospital emergency department and pronounced dead. Autopsy findings included marked encephalitis. Laboratory evidence of influenza A (flu) infection was reported on March 13, 2008. Laboratory testing to determine the specific strain of influenza A are pending. The deceased was a 4 year old pre-schooler, who attended the Jewish Community Center's Early Childhood Program in Getzville, NY and the Little Red Schoolhouse in Williamsville, NY.

Parents of students attending the Jewish Community Center's Early Childhood Program and the Little Red Schoolhouse have been notified of this occurrence.

Influenza infections are common with an estimated 5% to 20% of persons in the United States becoming ill each influenza season. Encephalitis as a complication of influenza is extremely rare. Symptoms of influenza include: fever (usually high), headache, extreme fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion and muscle aches. Providers are encouraged to consider influenza in their differential for patients presenting with these symptoms.

Prevention and Treatment:

Annual vaccination remains the best method for preventing influenza and its complications in children and adults even in years where there is a suboptimal match between vaccine and circulating strains of influenza viruses. At this time, vaccination efforts should continue to occur. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination for children 6 months through 5 years of age, and their household members and others in close contact with children younger than 5 years old, especially contacts and caregivers of children younger than 6 months old.

The ECDOH is working with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) to obtain influenza vaccine for distribution to local providers. Providers who need a supply of influenza vaccine to accommodate their patients may contact the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) at (716) 858-7697 during regular business hours, or at (716) 961-7898 after-hours.

Influenza antiviral drugs are an important second line of defense against influenza and can be used to treat flu and to prevent flu. Early treatment of high-risk adults infected with the flu has been shown to reduce the risk of death, but less information is available for children. Regardless, early antiviral treatment of high-risk children or any child who is moderately or severely ill with the flu may help. Unfortunately, no influenza antiviral medications are FDA-approved for children less than 1 year old. Antiviral medications can also be used to prevent the flu. Providers may consider giving antivirals to a person who may not respond to the flu vaccine because they have a severely weakened immune system or because they were exposed to someone else with flu illness, are unvaccinated, or may not be adequately protected after vaccination, and are at higher risk of complications.

However, after consultation with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), in this particular setting chemoprophylaxis of contacts to the deceased is not recommended for most individuals.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact the Erie County Department of Health's Epidemiology and Surveillance program at 716-858-7697 during regular business hours or (716) 961-7898 after-hours.

For additional information please visit the following links:

General influenza information: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>

Influenza vaccine recommendations: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/acip/index.htm>

Influenza antiviral drugs: <http://www2a.cdc.gov/HAN/ArchiveSys/ViewMsgV.asp?AlertNum=00271>

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/>

Health Category Definitions:

Health Alert FLASH: conveys the highest level of importance due to a large-scale, catastrophic public health emergency; warrants immediate action or attention

Health Alert Priority: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention to a health problem or situation

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary