

For Health Professionals

Health Alerts

Health Advisory #55 - Influenza A Alert - 11/28/2003

BACKGROUND

In the last few weeks, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has received reports of cases of laboratory-confirmed influenza A from providers and laboratories located in Broome, Erie, Madison, Monroe, Nassau, Schoharie, Suffolk, Tompkins, Westchester counties and all five New York City boroughs.

Erie County has reported 1 confirmed case of influenza A (rapid antigen) as of this alert. The isolate was collected from a 4 year-old male in Buffalo on 11/21.

Current national surveillance data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that the United States is experiencing an early influenza season that could be more severe than in the past three years. The situation underscores the need for timely immunization of those people most at risk from serious complications of influenza and the people taking care of them, especially health-care workers.

So far, the majority of the influenza viruses identified in the United States this winter have been type A (H3N2) viruses, which historically have been associated with relatively severe influenza epidemics. Of the influenza A (H3N2) viruses from the United States that have been analyzed at CDC, 78% are similar to the A/Fujian/411/2002 strain, which evolved or "drifted" from the A/Panama/2007/99 strain present in the current vaccine, and the remaining 22% are similar to the vaccine strain. The A/Fujian/411/2002 drift variant was the predominant influenza strain circulating in Australia and New Zealand during their most recent influenza season, which was characterized as "moderately severe." These factors could portend higher morbidity and mortality in the United States, including New York State, during the 2003-04 influenza season.

Although this year's vaccine contains the Panama strain of influenza A (H3N2), it is expected to provide some cross-protection against the Fujian-like viruses that are currently circulating. The other two virus strains (influenza A [H1N1] and influenza B) in the vaccine closely match their circulating counterparts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF NOSOCOMIAL INFLUENZA OUTBREAKS

1. Ensure optimal influenza vaccination of patients, residents and employees.
2. Be on the alert for the occurrence of febrile respiratory illness in patients, residents or employees.
3. Ensure ill employees do not work until their illness resolves.
4. Report nosocomial respiratory outbreaks to the NYSDOH by completing the DOH-4018 form, at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/infection/infecreport.pdf>, and faxing it to

the NYSDOH Infection Control Program at (518) 474-7381. Also report the outbreak, by telephone, to your local health department.

5. Use the respiratory illness line list form, at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/infection/doh-496.pdf>, to record cases.
6. Test ill patients or residents for influenza via rapid antigen testing and culture.
7. If long-term care facilities identify influenza A as the cause of an outbreak, NYSDOH strongly recommends the use of influenza antiviral prophylaxis to control the outbreak.
8. If a nosocomial influenza outbreak occurs in your facility, notify receiving facilities of the outbreak when transfers occur.

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>

Consultation regarding control of nosocomial influenza outbreaks is available from NYSDOH epidemiologists located in the Western Regional Office at (716) 847-4503.

For additional information and weekly statewide influenza updates, please refer to the NYSDOH's website at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/flu/index.htm>

If you have additional questions, please contact your NYSDOH Regional Office at the number listed above, the Regional Epidemiology Program at (518) 473-4439, or the Erie County Department of Health at (716) 858-7967.