

For Health Professionals

Health Alerts

Health Advisory #69 - Influenza B - April 26, 2004

Background

In the last few weeks, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has received reports of laboratory-confirmed nosocomial influenza B outbreaks from five long-term care facilities and one assisted living facility located in New York City, and Suffolk and Westchester Counties. Additionally, laboratories in New York City and the counties of Monroe, Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester have reported more than 20 respiratory specimens positive for influenza B in the last few weeks.

Ill residents in the nosocomial outbreaks had symptoms including fever ranging from 99° F to 101.4° F, cough, nasal congestion, rhinitis, malaise and headache. Because of this increase in influenza B activity, NYSDOH recommends that any facility with patients or residents experiencing febrile respiratory illness should test them to learn if influenza B might be the cause of the illness, and should institute control measures as recommended.

In facilities who are experiencing an increase in febrile respiratory illness among patients or staff, NYSDOH recommends that facilities collect respiratory specimens on six to ten newly-ill residents and submit the specimens to a laboratory that is able to perform rapid antigen testing as well as culture for both influenza A and influenza B. Experience in the above-mentioned outbreaks has demonstrated that many specimens that were negative on rapid antigen testing were subsequently positive on culture for influenza B.

If influenza B is found to be the cause of an outbreak, in accordance with CDC recommendations, NYSDOH recommends that oseltamivir be given as treatment of ill residents for a period of five days and as prophylaxis of well residents for a period of 14 days. Oseltamivir prophylaxis in the above- mentioned outbreaks was used to shorten the course of the outbreaks.

In addition to antiviral treatment and prophylaxis, NYSDOH recommends the following measures for the control of nosocomial influenza outbreaks:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF NOSOCOMIAL INFLUENZA OUTBREAKS

1. Be on the alert for the occurrence of febrile respiratory illness in patients, residents or employees.
2. Ensure ill employees do not work until their illness resolves.
3. Report nosocomial respiratory outbreaks by telephone to the NYSDOH Western Regional Office (716) 847-4503 and the Erie County Department of Health (716) 858-7697 (Monday - Friday, 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM) or (716) 898-4225 (Weekends, Evenings and Holidays).

4. Complete the NYSDOH form 4018, at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/infection/infecreport.pdf> and the respiratory illness line list, at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/infection/doh-496.pdf>. Fax both completed forms to the NYSDOH Infection Control Program at (518) 474-7381.
5. Place ill residents on Droplet Precautions for the duration of their illness.
6. Test ill residents for influenza A and B via rapid antigen testing and culture.
7. If influenza A or B is identified 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>.