

Alaska Public Health Update

Update: Pandemic Influenza A (H1N1) in Alaska and New Testing Recommendations

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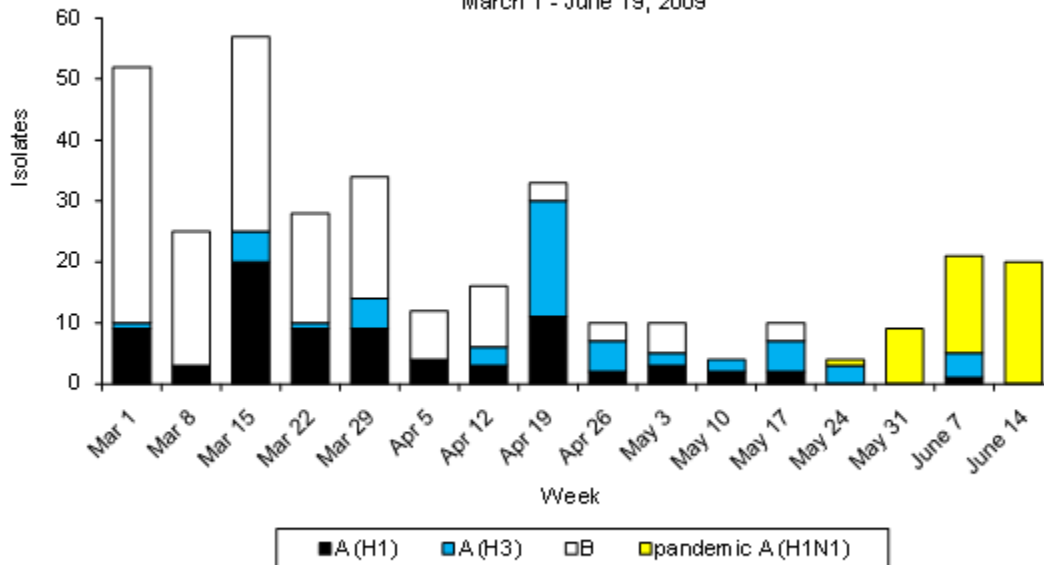
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Forty-four cases of laboratory-confirmed pandemic influenza A (H1N1) (swine flu) have been reported from the Alaska State Virology Laboratory (ASVL) as of 4 PM, Tuesday, June 23, 2009. Four regions of the state have had at least one case, including the Interior, Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna, Gulf Coast, and Southeast Alaska. Laboratory-confirmed pandemic influenza A (H1N1) has not yet been reported from the Northern or Southwestern regions of the state. There have been no deaths however at least three individuals were hospitalized.

The ASVL has processed 1803 specimens since March 1, 2009. During March, April, and the first three weeks of May, seasonal influenza continued to circulate in Alaska. However seasonal influenza, for the most part, has been replaced with pandemic influenza A (H1N1) during the first three weeks of June (Figure). This trend has also been seen throughout the U.S. During the week of June 7, 2009, more than 98% of subtyped influenza A viruses reported to CDC were pandemic influenza A (H1N1) viruses (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm>).

Figure: Influenza Types and Subtypes in Alaska
Reported by the Alaska State Virology Laboratory

March 1 - June 19, 2009



Based on these findings, the recommendations for laboratory testing for pandemic influenza A (H1N1) have been modified:

Specimens that do not need to be submitted to the ASVL

- Outpatient specimens that are positive by rapid influenza A testing should no longer be submitted to the ASVL. These patients can be assumed to have the pandemic strain of influenza.
- Specimens that are positive by rapid influenza B testing should not be submitted to the ASVL.

Specimens that should be submitted to the ASVL

- Specimens from hospitalized patients with influenza-like illness, regardless of rapid test results, should be submitted to ASVL for testing.
- Outpatient specimens from patients with moderate to severe influenza-like illness that are negative for influenza A on rapid test should be submitted to ASVL for testing.

The turn-around time from the ASVL varies from 3 to 7 days from the time the laboratory receives the specimen. Because of this, clinical decisions for antiviral drug treatment and prophylaxis for high-risk individuals should be based on symptoms of influenza-like illness and whether pandemic influenza A (H1N1) virus is circulating in the region. Laboratory-confirmed cases of pandemic influenza are posted daily by region at <http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/id/influenza/swineflu.htm>.

Contact the Alaska Section of Epidemiology for questions and consultations at 907-269-8000 during business hours and 800-478-0084 after hours.

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