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Alaska Public Health Advisory

Early Influenza Season Activity in Alaska

September 12, 2017

The purpose of this Public Health Advisory is to inform Alaska health care providers of a recent increase in influenza activity in Alaska. Currently, all regions of the state are reporting cases; strains detected include influenza A/H3, A/H1 and influenza B. More information is available in the Alaska Influenza Surveillance Report [1].

Clinicians should commence vaccinating patients for this season now and should continue for as long as influenza viruses are circulating. Providing antiviral treatment for severely ill and high-risk patients is recommended if influenza is suspected or confirmed.

Recommendations for Health Care Providers

Vaccination

Vaccination is recommended for all persons aged ≥ 6 months who do not have contraindications. Vaccination should optimally occur before the onset of influenza activity in the community. The Alaska Immunization Program is supplying the following presentations of influenza vaccine this season [2].

Pediatric Influenza Vaccine

- Sanofi Fluzone pre-filled syringe, 0.25mL, quadrivalent, 6–35 months
- Sanofi Fluzone multi-dose vial, 5mL, quadrivalent, ≥ 6 months
- GSK Fluarix pre-filled syringe, 0.5mL, quadrivalent, ≥ 36 months

Adult Influenza Vaccine

- Sanofi Fluzone multi-dose vial, 5mL, quadrivalent, ≥ 6 months
- GSK Fluarix pre-filled syringe, 0.5mL, quadrivalent, ≥ 36 months
- Sanofi Fluzone High-Dose pre-filled syringe, 0.5mL, trivalent, ≥ 65 years
 - A limited number of Sanofi Fluzone High-Dose vaccine will be available for providers who serve patients 65 years and older.

Health care providers enrolled to receive state-supplied vaccine can order influenza vaccine by submitting an online order in VacTrAK (Alaska's Immunization Information System), using the MCKESSON FLU 2017–18 order set. Providers not enrolled to receive state-supplied vaccines can purchase them from the manufacturer.

Antiviral Treatment

Antiviral treatment is recommended as early as possible for any patient with confirmed or suspected influenza who

- is hospitalized;
- has severe, complicated, or progressive illness; or
- is at higher risk for influenza complications [3].

Treatment of persons with suspected influenza should not wait for laboratory confirmation of influenza. When there is clinical suspicion of influenza and antiviral treatment is indicated, antiviral treatment should be started as soon as possible, along with use of appropriate infection control measures. Antiviral treatment can also be considered for any previously healthy, symptomatic patient with confirmed or suspected influenza based on clinical judgment, if treatment can be initiated within 48 hours of illness onset.

The antiviral medications that are currently recommended for treatment of influenza are oral oseltamivir and inhaled zanamivir [3]. Clinical benefit is greatest when antiviral treatment is administered early. When indicated, antiviral treatment should be started as soon as possible after illness onset, ideally within 48 hours of symptom onset. However, antiviral treatment might still be beneficial in patients with severe, complicated or progressive illness and in hospitalized patients when started after 48 hours of illness onset, as indicated by observational studies.

Surveillance

All laboratory-confirmed influenza results, whether obtained via rapid test kits or other testing methods, are reportable to the Alaska Section of Epidemiology (SOE) [4]. Report forms are available at: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/Pages/pubs/conditions/default.aspx>

Outbreaks or clusters of respiratory illness should be reported to SOE at (907) 269-8000 or afterhours at (800) 478-0084. Additionally, any suspected or confirmed influenza death should be reported to SOE. Respiratory specimens for individuals with influenza-like illness may be submitted to the Alaska State Viral Laboratory for respiratory viral panel testing. Information regarding testing is available at: <http://www.dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Labs/Documents/LaboratoryTests.pdf>

References:

1. Alaska Influenza Surveillance Report. Available at: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/influenza/influenza.aspx>
2. Influenza Vaccines Available During the 2017-2018 Season. Available at: http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2017_23.pdf
3. CDC Influenza Antiviral Medications: Summary for Clinicians. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/summary-clinicians.htm>
4. Conditions Reportable to Public Health in Alaska. Available at: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/Pages/pubs/conditions/default.aspx>

For more information:

CDC Infection Control in Health Care Facilities. Available at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/index.htm>

CDC Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette in Healthcare Settings Resources. Available at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm>

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