

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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Influenza Outbreak in a Southeastern Pennsylvania
Nursing Home



DATE: September 22, 2010
TO: Health Alert Network
FROM: Everette James, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT: Influenza Outbreak in a Southeastern Pennsylvania Nursing Home
DISTRIBUTION: Statewide
LOCATION: Statewide
STREET ADDRESS: Statewide
COUNTY: Statewide
MUNICIPALITY: Statewide
ZIP CODE: Statewide

This transmission is a “Health Advisory” provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING, AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL

EMS COUNCILS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

FQHCs: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) is issuing this alert following the identification of an outbreak of influenza in a southeastern Pennsylvania nursing home. Between August 25 and September 10, 2010, a total of 33 nursing home residents and staff members developed illness, and influenza A (H3N2) was confirmed as the cause on September 17th. Illness was generally mild and there were no fatalities. It is very unusual to identify outbreaks of seasonal influenza in late summer. Because of this finding, PADOH is encouraging clinicians throughout the state to consider the diagnosis of influenza in patients with febrile respiratory illness and to collect appropriate specimens for diagnosis.

Influenza vaccine is strongly recommended for all patients and staff members of long term care facilities because of the large number of individuals at high risk of influenza complications. To ensure immunity lasts throughout the influenza season, most long term care facilities do not conduct vaccination campaigns until later in the fall. However, this year influenza vaccine distribution is well underway. In light of this outbreak and early than usual distribution of the vaccine, PADOH encourages facilities that have already received their 2010-2011 trivalent influenza vaccine to initiate vaccination activities as soon as possible.

Before the detection of this outbreak, influenza activity in Pennsylvania over the summer had been sporadic. Since June 2010, a total of 14 cases of influenza in the Commonwealth were

confirmed at the PADOH Bureau of Laboratories, with 12 of the illnesses due to influenza A (H3N2) and 2 due to pandemic influenza A (H1N1). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes similar findings of mixed seasonal and pandemic influenza elsewhere in the United States during the same time period. Strain characterization at CDC has shown the circulating viruses are well matched to strains included in the 2010-2011 trivalent influenza vaccine.

Influenza seasons where A (H3N2) predominates are usually marked by significant levels of disease in older age groups along with associated increases in morbidity and mortality. This is in contrast to last year's influenza A (H1N1) pandemic where older age groups were largely spared and children and young adults were disproportionately affected.

Vaccination in persons over the age of 65 years is especially important for preventing influenza infection and reducing complications. When vaccine is well matched to circulating strains, the duration of protection should last for at least 6-8 months. The Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP) now recommends that all persons >6 months of age receive influenza vaccine as a routine preventive measure, although vaccination of those at risk of influenza complications remains the highest priority. 2010 recommendations for prevention and control of influenza were recently published by the ACIP (1).

In Pennsylvania, confirmed influenza is reportable to local and state health department. In addition, any suspected outbreak of influenza should be promptly reported to your health department even before laboratory confirmation has occurred.

Questions or concerns regarding these recommendations or general questions regarding influenza should be directed to your local health department or PADOH at 1-877-PA-Health. Fact sheets regarding influenza can also be found on the PADOH web page at www.health.state.pa.us.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

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; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of September 22, 2010 but may be modified in the future.
