News & Updates
Vaccination is the best way to protect against influenza infection and all Chicagoans six months and older are encouraged to get vaccinated. Chicagoans should ask their healthcare provider or pharmacist about vaccine availability. For those without a healthcare provider or whose healthcare providers do not have the influenza vaccine, a list of City of Chicago Walk-In Immunization Clinics¹ is available on the city website and by calling 311. To locate the closest City of Chicago clinic or retail pharmacy, go to www.chicagoflushots.org.

What is the risk?
Currently, the risk of influenza infection continues to increase.

Are severe cases of influenza occurring?
For the week of December 30, 2018-January 5, 2019, nine influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations were reported (Figure 1).

Since September 30, 2018, 32 influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations have been reported; 27 were positive for influenza A (18 H1N1pdm09 and 9 unknown subtype [subtyping not attempted or not all subtypes tested]) and five were positive for influenza B. The median age of reported cases is 61.5 years (range 6 months-87 years); three cases were admitted from long-term care facilities; selected attributes are summarized in Table 1.

Which influenza strains are circulating?
Data on influenza virus test results are reported by Chicago laboratories performing influenza RT-PCR. For the week of December 30, 2018-January 5, 2019, with 5 laboratories reporting, 86 of the 1,014 (8.5%) specimens tested for influenza were positive; 77 typed as influenza A (29 H1N1pdm09, 3 H3N2, and 45 unknown subtype) and one typed as influenza B (Figure 3).

Since September 30, 2018, 240 of 9,785 (2.5%) specimens tested for influenza have been positive; 240 typed as influenza A (91 H1N1pdm09, 8 H3N2, and 136 unknown subtype [subtyping not performed or not all subtypes tested]) and five typed as influenza B.

How much influenza-like illness is occurring?
Several outpatient clinics throughout Chicago participate in CDC’s Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet) by reporting on a weekly basis the total number of outpatient clinic visits, and of those visits, the number with influenza-like illness (ILI). For the week of December 30, 2018-January 5, 2019, 92 of the 3,831 (2.4%) reported outpatient clinic visits were due to influenza-like illness, which is similar to both Illinois (2.9%) and Region 5 (2.6%) but lower than the U.S. (3.5%) (Figure 4).

In addition to ILINet, ESSENCE is an electronic syndromic surveillance system that utilizes the chief complaints of patients visiting emergency departments to monitor for influenza-like illness. Currently, ESSENCE captures every emergency department visit in the city on a daily basis. For the week of December 30, 2018-January 5, 2019, 799 of the 25,078 (3.2%) total emergency department visits were due to influenza-like illness (Figure 5).

Figure 6 represents the percentage of emergency department visits due to influenza-like illness aggregated by patient zip code. For the week of December 30, 2018-January 5, 2019, 40 of 59 (68%) zip codes had ILI activity levels in the moderate to high categories; this is lower than last season where 86% of zip codes were at moderate to high levels for the same time period (Figure 7).

Where can I get more information?
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s FluView report provides national updates and trends related to the intensity of influenza activity across the United States, as well as detailed information on antiviral resistance, severity of illness, and other topics. Updates specific to Illinois and Suburban Cook County are also available online. Current and archived issues of the Chicago Flu Update can be found on the CDPH website section Current Flu Situation in Chicago.

Reporting Information
The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has issued influenza testing and reporting recommendations. In addition, The Chicago Department of Public Health recently issued guidance on reporting influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations. Healthcare facilities can report cases to the Chicago Department of Public Health via the Illinois National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (INEDSS).

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