**News & Updates**

This is the first *Chicago Flu Update* of the 2019-2020 influenza season. This report will be issued every Friday until May 2020. The Illinois Department of Public Health recently issued *Influenza Testing and Reporting Guidance* which outlines influenza testing recommendations and reporting requirements. 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 schedule of *City of Chicago influenza vaccination clinics* 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 is low.

**Are severe cases of influenza occurring?**

For the week of September 29-October 5, 2019, one influenza-associated ICU hospitalization was reported, which was positive for influenza A (H3N2) (Figure 1).

**Influenza Season Severity**

The CDC Influenza Division recently published a study on utilizing surveillance indicators to assess the overall severity of influenza seasons which may help guide public health action.

Applying these methods to Chicago surveillance indicators, severity was determined for the previous nine influenza seasons (Table 1). The severity of Chicago influenza seasons closely matched those assessed in the study. The majority of the Chicago influenza seasons were categorized as moderate severity while two influenza seasons were categorized as high and very high severity. The 2014-2015 season was characterized by the mismatch of the influenza A (H3N2) virus component of the vaccine to circulating virus and 2017-2018 was characterized by a record number of ICU hospitalizations and a high percentage of specimens testing positive for influenza. The 2018-2019 season was categorized as low severity; CDC national data was consistent with moderate severity. Assessing the severity of an influenza season can be useful for response efforts as well as for future planning activities.

Table 1. Influenza season severity for the previous nine seasons based on surveillance indicators, Chicago.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severity Category</th>
<th>Influenza Season</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>2017-2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>2018-2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Preliminary; severity categories are based on the availability of current surveillance indicators, each of which has its own limitations.

**Which influenza strains are circulating?**

Data on influenza virus test results are reported by Chicago laboratories performing influenza RT-PCR. For the week of September 29-October 5, 2019, 3 of the 373 (<1%) specimens tested for influenza were positive for influenza A (H3N2) (Figure 2). In 2018-2019, 31,105 specimens were tested for influenza (and other respiratory pathogens); a total of 3,292 (10.6%) were positive, the majority (94%) were influenza A. Among the positive influenza A specimens, only 1,023 (33%) were subtyped; of those subtyped, 728 (71%) were H1N1pdm09.
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 September 29-October 5, 2019, 95 of the 5,737 (1.7%) reported outpatient clinic visits were due to influenza-like illness (Figure 3).

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 nearly every emergency department visit in the city on a daily basis. For the week of September 29-October 5, 2019, 26 of the 2,471 (1.6%) total emergency department visits were due to influenza-like illness (Figure 4).

Figure 5 represents the percentage of emergency department visits due to influenza-like illness aggregated by patient zip code. For the week of September 29-October 5, 2019, 10 of 59 (17%) zip codes had ILI activity levels in the moderate to high; this is similar to last season where 17% of zip codes were also at moderate to high levels for the same time period.

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
Healthcare facilities can report cases to the Chicago Department of Public Health via the Illinois National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (INEDSS). Contact SyndromicSurveillance@cityofchicago.org for more information. The Chicago Department of Public Health has previously issued guidance on reporting influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations.

---

GET YOUR FLU SHOT
WWW.CHICAGO.GOV/FLU

---