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 schedule of City of Chicago influenza vaccination 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 is low.

Are severe cases of influenza occurring?
For the week of November 4-10, 2018, one influenza-associated ICU hospitalization was reported, which was positive for influenza A (H1N1pdm09).

Since September 30, 2018, six influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations have been reported; five were positive for influenza A (2 H1N1pdm09 and 3 unknown subtype [subtyping not attempted or not all subtypes tested]) and one was positive for influenza B (Figure 1).

Since 2010-2011, there have been four influenza A (H3N2) predominant seasons and two influenza A (H1N1pdm09) predominant seasons. The cumulative average number of influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations for H3N2 predominant seasons has been higher than H1N1pdm09 seasons, with the 2017-2018 season contributing significantly to this difference. On average 26 more cases were reported weekly during H3N2 seasons than in H1N1pdm09 seasons (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Number of influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations reported for Chicago residents, for the current season (2018-2019) by influenza type and subtype, October-May.

Figure 2. Cumulative average number of influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations for previous eight seasons, for H3N2 seasons, and H1N1pdm09 seasons, Chicago, October-May.

Which influenza strains are circulating?
Data on influenza virus test results are reported by Chicago laboratories performing influenza RT-PCR. For the week of November 4-10, 2018, with 5 laboratories reporting, 0 of the 629 specimens tested for influenza were positive (Figure 3).

Since September 30, 2018, 6 of 3,579 (<1%) specimens tested for influenza have been positive; 6 typed as influenza A (4 H1N1pdm09 and 2 unknown subtype [subtyping not performed or not all subtypes tested]).

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 November 4-10, 2018, 107 of the 5,841 (1.8%) reported outpatient clinic visits were due to influenza-like illness, which is similar to Illinois (1.3%), to the U.S. (1.9%) and to Region 5 (1.3%) (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 November 4-10, 2018, 529 of the 23,570 (2.2%) 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 November 4-10, 2018, 28 of 59 (47%) zip codes had ILI activity levels in the moderate to high categories; this is higher than last season where 25% 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).