Are severe cases of influenza occurring?
The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has issued influenza testing and reporting guidance\(^3\). Suspected novel and variant influenza, pediatric influenza-associated deaths, influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations and outbreaks of influenza-like illness in a congregate setting should all be reported to CDPH via I-NEDSS\(^4\). For the week of December 22-28, 2013 (week 52), 14 influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations were reported, all of which were positive for influenza A (2 [H1N1]pdm09 and 12 unknown subtype [subtyping not attempted or not all subtypes tested]). This week last season, there were 36 reported ICU hospitalizations.

Since September 29, 2013, 38 influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations have been reported (Figure 1). Among the total ICU hospitalizations reported 36 were positive for influenza A (10 [H1N1]pdm09 and 26 unknown subtype) and 2 was positive for influenza B. Twenty-one (55.2%) were female, 18 (47.3%) were 50 years of age or older, and four (10.5%) were 4 years of age or younger (median age of 49 years with a range of 4 months-83 years). Seventeen (44.7%) were Black, twenty (52.6%) had lung disease (including asthma) and thirteen (34.2%) required ventilator support. One death has been reported.

How much influenza-like illness is occurring?
CDPH receives data from over 50 surveillance sites across Chicago, which report the total number of patient visits seen weekly, and of those visits, the number with influenza-like illness (ILI) (i.e., fever of 100°F or greater, with cough or sore throat). All hospitals in Chicago that provide emergent care are required to report on a weekly basis the total number of emergency department visits, and of those visits, the number with ILI. For the week of December 22-28, 2013, with 14 hospitals reporting, 5.6% of emergency department visits were due to ILI. This is the seventh consecutive week that an increase has been noted (Figure 2).

**ESSENCE** is an electronic syndromic surveillance system that utilizes emergency department chief complaint data submitted daily by participating Chicago hospitals. ILI activity is determined solely based on the patient’s chief complaint and does not take into account the entire medical record, as the ILI activity reported in Figure 2 does.

Currently, 9 Chicago hospitals submit data to ESSENCE. **Figure 3** shows the percent of the total emergency department visits due to ILI for pediatric patients (4.4%) and adult patients (2.9%) for the week of December 22-28, 2013 plus the ILI activity by age group for the previous season.

Several outpatient clinics and hospital emergency departments throughout Chicago participate in CDC’s Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet) by reporting on the number of patients with ILI seen weekly. From December 22-28, 2013, with 47 facilities reporting, 5.7% of outpatient visits were due to influenza-like illness. Currently, ILI activity is almost two percentage points lower than levels seen during the same week last season (**Figure 4**).

**Which influenza strains are circulating?**

Data on influenza virus test results are reported by Chicago laboratories performing influenza subtyping. For the week of December 22-28, 2013, with 5 laboratories reporting, 87 of the 564 (15.4%) specimens tested for influenza were positive. This week last season, 31.4% of specimens tested were positive for influenza. Among this week’s positive specimens, 87 were typed as influenza A (54 [H1N1]pdm09, 1 H3N2 and 32 unknown subtype) (**Figure 5**). Since September 29, 2013, 231 of 4,864 (3.3%) specimens tested for influenza have been positive; 220 typed as influenza A (138 [H1N1]pdm09, 4 H3N2, and 78 unknown subtype) and 11 typed as influenza B.

**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**. The Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council (MCHC) and CDPH recently released “**Stop the Spread: A Health Care Guide to Influenza Preparedness**”. This report provides an overview of influenza, it’s impact on public health and how hospitals can prepare for, mitigate the impact of and respond to influenza infections and outbreaks.

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