**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 October 14-20, 2018, no influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations were reported. Since September 30, 2018, three influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations were reported; all were positive for influenza A by rapid test (not subtyped) (Figure 1).

**Influenza A Subtyping**

During previous influenza seasons, over half of all influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations that were positive for influenza A were subtyped (e.g. H3N2, H1N1pdm09). During the 2017-2018 season, this percentage decreased to less than 40% (Figure 3). For severe cases of influenza requiring ICU hospitalization, it is important, for surveillance purposes, to characterize the subtype of influenza A viruses that are contributing to severe disease. These data are used to monitor any changes in the epidemiology of high risk groups and to detect possible un-subtypable influenza A viruses, which may indicate a novel strain.

**Which influenza strains are circulating?**

Data on influenza virus test results are reported by Chicago laboratories performing influenza RT-PCR. For the week of October 14-20, 2018, with 6 laboratories reporting, 1 of the 644 specimens tested for influenza was positive for influenza A (unknown subtype) (Figure 2).

Since September 30, 2018, 2 of 1,646 (<1%) specimens tested for influenza has been positive for influenza A (unknown subtype [subtyping not performed or not all subtypes tested]).

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How much influenza-like illness is occurring?
ESSENCE is an electronic syndromic surveillance system used to monitor influenza-like illness by utilizing the chief complaints of patients visiting emergency departments. Currently, all Chicago hospitals submit data to ESSENCE on a daily basis, covering every emergency department visit in the city. For the week of October 14-20, 2018 406 of the 23,047 (1.8%) total emergency department visits were due to influenza-like illness (ILI) (Figure 4).

In addition to emergency departments, several outpatient clinics throughout Chicago participate in CDC’s Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet) by also 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 October 14-20, 2018, with 21 facilities reporting, 1.7% of outpatient clinic visits were due to influenza-like illness, which is slightly higher than Illinois (1.0%), to the U.S. (1.5%) and to Region 5 (1.1%) (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 October 14-20, 2018, 17 of 59 (29%) zip codes had ILI activity levels in the moderate to high categories and 42 (71%) had ILI activity levels in the minimal to low categories.

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). Contact SyndromicSurveillance@cityofchicago.org for more information.

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