What is the risk?
As of September 18, 2009, the risk of pandemic influenza A (H1N1) and seasonal influenza infection in Chicago is low but increasing. The Illinois Department of Public Health has updated its assessment of influenza activity in the state to “widespread,” meaning that increases in influenza-like illnesses and laboratory-confirmed cases have been identified in more than half of the regions of the state. (An influenza-like illness is defined as fever of 100°F or greater, with cough or sore throat.) In light of this increase in influenza activity, Chicagoans are encouraged to take steps to minimize their risk and prepare for the possibility of becoming infected (for example, see this checklist). Seasonal influenza vaccine is already available. Chicagoans should contact their health care providers to get a seasonal influenza vaccine. Those without a health care provider or whose health care providers do not have vaccine, should call 311 to find a City of Chicago clinic.

Are severe cases of influenza occurring?
Four reports of Chicago residents being hospitalized in association with influenza infection were received in the past week. In comparison, during the peak of pandemic influenza A (H1N1) activity in the spring, there were as many as 40 influenza hospitalization reports per week. One influenza-associated death was reported in a person aged over 60 years who had an underlying illness. This brochure provides information and suggestions for individuals at high risk for severe complications from influenza infections.

How much influenza-like illness is occurring?
Monitoring the percent of visits that are due to influenza-like illness in doctors’ offices is an established method of tracking influenza activity in a community. Thirteen doctors’ offices in Chicago are currently enrolled to report the percent of influenza-like illness on a weekly basis. For surveillance week 36 (September 6 – 12, 2009), with six offices reporting, 3.3% of office visits were due to influenza-like illness (figure). This is a 37% increase over the rate for the previous week.

On a weekly basis, all Chicago hospitals are required to report the percent of visits made to their emergency rooms by patients who have influenza-like illness. With 13 hospitals reporting, 2.8% of emergency room visits were due to influenza-like illness. This rate is the same as what was reported last week.

Which influenza strains are circulating?
In addition to the Illinois Department of Public Health Division of Laboratories, five local laboratories serving Chicago hospitals are currently equipped to identify influenza types. Aggregate weekly reports of influenza results from these laboratories are required to be reported to CDPH. For the week of September 6 – 12, 2009, with six laboratories reporting, 32 specimens were positive for influenza A. Of these, 26 (81%) were reported as confirmed or presumptive pandemic influenza A (H1N1) and six (19%) did not have subtyping performed. These results suggest that pandemic influenza A (H1N1), rather than a seasonal influenza strain, accounts for most of the disease currently occurring.

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 or Suburban Cook County may also available online. For information on where to get vaccinated, call 311.

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1 http://pandemicflu.gov/individual/#checklist
3 http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/
4 http://www.idph.state.il.us/flu/fluupdate08-09.htm
5 http://www.cookcountypublichealth.org