



Chicago Flu Update



City of Chicago

Rahm Emanuel, Mayor

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Chicago Department of Public Health

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What is the risk?

Currently, the risk of influenza infection in the Chicago area continues to increase. The percentage of specimens testing positive for influenza doubled from the previous week and nine additional influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations were reported for week 9. The influenza season is peaking more than a month later than the previous season. Still, the number of positive influenza specimens and the number of influenza-associated hospitalizations reported to CDPH remains substantially lower compared to the same time period last season, with nearly an 80% decrease in both. Vaccination is the best way to protect against human seasonal influenza infection and all Chicagoans aged six months and older are encouraged to get vaccinated. Chicagoans should ask their healthcare provider or pharmacist about vaccine availability. Uninsured individuals and those with insurance that does not cover flu shots can [obtain a voucher for a free flu shot at Walgreens](#)¹. The Chicago Department of Public Health has influenza vaccine available at [CDPH immunization clinics](#)².

Are severe cases of influenza occurring?

Nine influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations were reported for week 9 (February 26-March 3, 2012). Since October 2011, nineteen influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations have been reported. Among all hospitalized ICU cases, 47% were 50 years of age or older (range: 0-91 years, median: 48 years), 21% required intubation and 32% had underlying lung disease (including asthma). Of the 12 specimens that were positive for influenza A by PCR, 6 were subtyped as H1N1 and 6 were untyped. One death was reported. An outbreak in a congregate setting was also reported. Seven residents tested positive for influenza by rapid test, 5 as influenza B and 2 as influenza A (PCR confirmation is pending). Suspected novel influenza, pediatric influenza-associated deaths, and influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations should all be reported to CDPH via [INEDSS](#)³. Outbreaks of influenza-like illness in a congregate setting are also reportable; in Chicago call (312) 746-5911.

How much influenza-like illness is occurring?

For the week of February 26-March 3, 2012, with 18 hospitals reporting, 7.8% of emergency room visits were due to ILI (i.e., fever of 100°F or greater, with cough or sore throat). This is the highest level seen all season and is similar to levels seen during the same surveillance week in 2011. From February 26-March 3, 2012, with 16 outpatient clinics reporting, 5.2% of outpatient clinic visits were due to ILI. This is the highest level seen all season and is higher than levels seen during the same surveillance week in 2011 (Figure 1).

Which influenza strains are circulating?

Data on influenza virus test results are reported by Chicago laboratories performing influenza subtyping. For the week of February 26-March 3, 2012, with 5 laboratories reporting, 62 of 318 (19.5%) specimens tested for influenza were positive, the highest level seen all season (Figure 2). Among the positive specimens, 29 typed as influenza A (16 H1N1, 6 H3N2, 7 untyped), and 33 typed as influenza B. Since October 2011, 129 out of 4,028 (3.2%) specimens tested for influenza have been positive, with 76 typed as influenza A (36 H1N1, 25 H3N2, and 15 not subtyped) and 53 typed as influenza B.

Where can I get more information?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [FluView](#)⁴ 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](#)⁵ and [Suburban Cook County](#)⁶ are also available online.

Figure 1. Weekly reported percent of outpatient clinic visits attributed to influenza-like illness, Chicago, by week, for current season (2011-2012) and previous season (Chicago and Illinois), October-May.

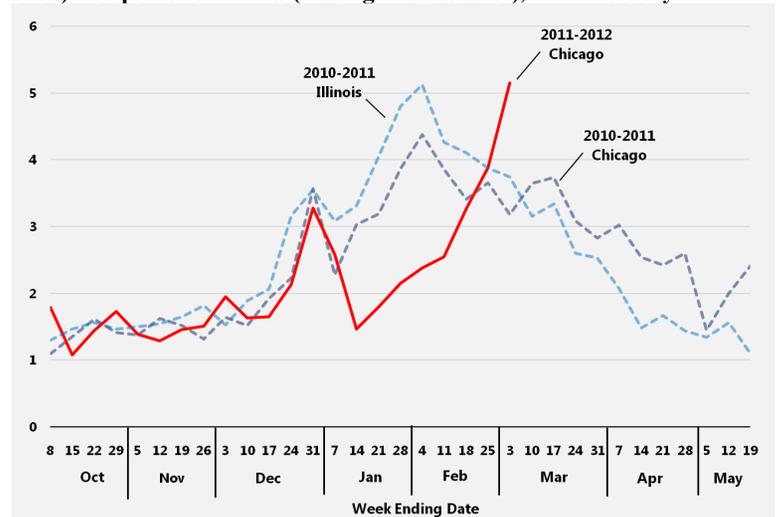
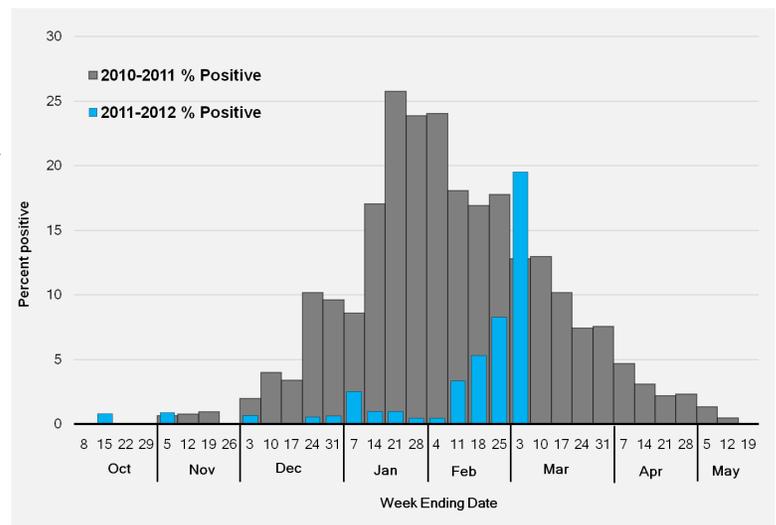


Figure 2. Percentage of specimens testing positive (by RT-PCR) for influenza as reported by local laboratories serving Chicago hospitals, for the current season (2011-2012) and previous season (2010-2011) October-May.



¹<https://www.chicagoan.org/ViewsFlash/servlet/flash?cmd=showform&pollid=Vouchers!Indiv>; ²http://www.cityofchicago.org/content/city/en/depts/cdp/supp_info/infectious/immunizations_walk-inclinics.html; ³<https://dph.partner.illinois.gov/>; ⁴<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm>; ⁵<http://www.idph.state.il.us/flu/surveillance.htm>; ⁶<http://www.cookcountypublichealth.org/data-reports#influenza>