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Maine Health Alert Network (HAN) System

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To: All Health Care
From: Dr. Isaac Benowitz, State Epidemiologist
Subject: **Influenza Arrives in Maine**
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Influenza Arrives in Maine

Influenza has arrived in Maine. Multiple Maine facilities reported influenza positive rapid results in recent weeks, and Maine's Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL) has just confirmed two cases using real-time reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (real time-RT PCR) testing. Both specimens tested positive for influenza A/H3. These individuals are adults who were not hospitalized. One patient was unvaccinated, and the vaccine status remains unknown for the other.

The 2021–2022 influenza surveillance season officially began on October 3, 2021. Though seasonal influenza activity in the United State remains low, both Influenza A and B viruses are currently circulating nationally. It is not too late to get vaccinated.

Recommendations:

Diagnosis of influenza during the COVID-19 pandemic: Symptoms of influenza and COVID-19 can be similar, making it difficult to diagnose based on symptoms alone. Testing may be needed. Clinicians should consider influenza in the differential diagnosis of febrile respiratory illnesses in patients of any age, especially in individuals who have a negative SARS-CoV-2 test. Clinicians should encourage their patients to be immunized against influenza in the 2021-2022 influenza season if they have not already done so and should review updated recommendations of the use of antiviral medications for influenza prophylaxis and treatment.

Treatment: Oseltamivir, zanamivir, peramivir, and baloxavir marboxil are drugs currently recommended for treatment and oseltamivir and zanamivir are recommended for prophylaxis. Providers will be notified through the Health Alert Network if national recommendations for treatment and prophylaxis are revised.

Laboratory: Diagnostic laboratories and other willing facilities should forward at least the first ten influenza positive specimens to HETL for confirmatory PCR and subtyping. Influenza testing through HETL is always

free of charge. Instructions on submitting specimens for influenza testing can be found at: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/health-and-environmental-testing/micro/submitting-samples.shtml>.

Reporting: Infection preventionists, laboratorians, clinicians, school nurses, and other reporting entities **must** report:

- Laboratory confirmed influenza hospitalizations,
- Pediatric influenza deaths, and
- Suspected outbreaks of influenza

to Maine CDC by phone at 1-800-821-5821 or by fax at 1-800-293-7534. Maine CDC appreciates all reports of positive influenza tests by any testing method either through electronic laboratory reporting, phone (1-800-821-5821), or fax (1-800-293-7534).

Vaccination: The best way to prevent influenza is by getting vaccinated. Maine CDC and national authorities recommend all individuals ages 6 months and older be immunized, even if they were vaccinated for influenza last season. Influenza vaccine is still available in Maine.

Prevention: As we enter the influenza season, it is important to remember the “No Flu 4 You” guidelines to help prevent illness: Wash your hands; cover your cough; stay home when you’re sick; and get vaccinated.

Additional Information:

- Information and recommendations on influenza for health professionals <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals>
- Information on the differences between Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19 <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>
- National influenza surveillance information <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/>
- Maine influenza surveillance information www.maineflu.gov