



Bulletin No. 4

March 26, 1982

Wide Spread Influenza Hits State

In the past three weeks, widespread outbreaks of influenza have been reported from throughout Alaska. Unusually large numbers of people with typical influenza symptoms of headache, myalgias, cough, fatigue, malaise, and fever were reported from Craig, Cordova, Prudhoe Bay, Bethel, Anchorage, and Fairbanks.

Our first isolates of influenza virus were obtained by Anchorage pediatricians from children ill the last week in January and the first week in February. B/Singapore/222/79 influenza virus was recovered from each. Since that time, numerous other isolates of B/Singapore/222/79 have been confirmed from patients in both Anchorage and Fairbanks. We would like to thank and commend our pediatricians who take the time and effort to obtain viral cultures as part of our viral culture surveillance system.

The early and prompt reporting of suspected influenza outbreaks allows for directed culturing efforts to obtain specimens to identify causative viral agents. The most sensitive indicator of the presence of influenza in the state has been the reporting of outbreaks of upper respiratory illness in children or adults.

The widespread outbreak of influenza in Alaska is unusual compared to influenza activity in the rest of the United States where few widespread outbreaks of influenza like illness have been reported and where only sporadic isolates of influenza virus have been obtained.

(Reported by Dr. John Tower, M.D., Dr. Thad Woodard, M.D., Anchorage; Don Ritter, Chief, Northern Regional Laboratory)

Reye's Syndrome and Aspirin

The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia recently reported the results of a special review of studies which have suggested a relationship between Reye's Syndrome and salicylates (i.e., aspirin) taken during an associated antecedent illness.

This special review concluded that there was "sufficient evidence to support the cautionary statements on salicylate usage that have been previously published by the Centers for Disease Control and the NIH Consensus Development Conference." They further concluded that "until the nature of the association between salicylates and Reye Syndrome is clarified, the use of salicylates should be avoided when possible, for children with varicella infections (chicken pox) and during presumed influenza outbreaks."

We reproduce the earlier CDC statement here: "Although the epidemiologic association between Reye Syndrome and antecedent viral illnesses is well established, the etiology of this rare disease remains unclear. Several previous reports have suggested the possibility that medications taken during the antecedent illness of patients with Reye Syndrome may play a role in the development of this disease, and aspirin is one medication which have been mentioned frequently. Reye Syndrome is rare and associated frequently with certain viruses.

"In 1976, the Food and Drug Administration advised that when treating children who develop vomiting associated with a viral illness, caution should be exercised in using acetaminophen, salicylates and antiemetics, because of the suspicion that these drugs in combination with viral illness (a possible cause of vomiting in children) might contribute to the development of Reye Syndrome. The results of three recent studies suggest that during certain viral illnesses, the use of salicylates - even before the onset of vomiting - may be a factor in the pathogenesis of Reye Syndrome. In view of these data, parents should be advised to use caution when administering salicylates to treat children with viral illness, particularly chicken pox and influenza-like illnesses."

(MMWR 1980; 29:532-539.) (MMWR 1982; 31:53-62.)