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NATION'S FIRST INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC STRIKES IN ALASKA

The excellence of the State Virology-Rabies Laboratory was again confirmed by their successful recovery of numerous isolates of influenza A from patients in Fairbanks and Anchorage in late September and October of this year. Since September 25, influenza virus has been recovered from 19 patients; 17 patients from the Fairbanks area, one from Anchorage and one from Glennallen. Seven of the viral isolates have been confirmed to be A/Bangkok/79 (H3N2). Work is continuing to identify the other influenza isolates, one of which is not A/Bangkok/79.

This outbreak represents the first confirmed outbreak of influenza in the United States in the 1982-1983 influenza season. The outbreak so far has predominately affected infants and preschool children. High absenteeism has been noted among daycare centers and preschools; pediatricians have reported seeing an increased number of young children with influenza symptoms in their offices. A review of school absenteeism records failed to disclose any unusual absenteeism rates. The Fairbanks Memorial Hospital reported an increase in the number of patients admitted for flu-like illness during the month of October. While most patients were elderly, several individuals 20-30 years old were admitted, as was one infant three months of age.

Only one Anchorage patient has been documented to have influenza, an eleven-year-old girl seen at the Alaska Native Medical Center on October 13. In Anchorage, the outbreak also seems to be predominately affecting preschool children and infants with limited morbidity occurring among the rest of the population. Additional surveillance studies are underway to define the extent of the outbreak in Alaska.

(Reported by Dr. John Allen MacFarlane, Dr. Richard Reem, Fairbanks; Pat Rogers, R.N. Northern Regional Manager, PHN; Dr. R.O. VanCamp, Glennallen; Dr. William Miner, ANMC, Anchorage; Jeannie Scott, R.N. Fairbanks Memorial Hospital; Don Ritter, Chief, Virology-Rabies Laboratory, Northern Regional Laboratory)

INFLUENZA SURVEILLANCE

We would like to encourage all physicians and other health care providers to promptly report outbreaks of influenza like illness among their patients. We are extremely interested in obtaining viral cultures to document influenza illness and to identify prevalent strains. Viral cultures are available free of charge through the Virology-Rabies Laboratory, Northern Regional Laboratory, Fairbanks, (474-7017). Outbreaks of upper respiratory illness or suspected influenza cases should be reported to Dr. Tom Kosatsky or Dr. John Middaugh, Epidemiology Office, Division of Public Health, Anchorage, (272-7534).