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Influenza Outbreak Strikes Alaskans

For the third time in the past 4 years, the first documented outbreaks of influenza in the nation have struck in Alaska. Widespread illness has occurred among Alaskans of all ages -- school children have been particularly hard hit. Viral isolates have been confirmed as Influenza -- A/Philippines/83/(H3N2) and B/USSR/100/85. Additional investigations are underway to determine the extent of the outbreak and to characterize further the influenza viruses causing widespread illness.

'Twas the fortnight before Christmas and all through the land,
not an Alaskan could be found without a handkerchief in hand.
Hot water bottles were steaming by the chimney with prayer
in the hopes that influenza vaccine soon would be there.
The children were nestled all snug in their beds
while visions of Tylenol danced in their heads.
Mama coughing in her kerchief, and I sniffing in my cap
had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap.
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I staggered to my feet to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I coughed but could not dash,
sneezed open the shutter and threw up on the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new fallen snow
luster of mid-day to Alaskans coughing below.
But what to my watering eyes should appear!
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer.
With a little old driver so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.
Faster than eagles, our symptoms they came,
he sneezed and he wheezed and he coughed out their names,
On headache, on fever, on sore throat, on pain,
on muscle aches, on back aches, on runny nose -- please drain!
To the top of the porch to the top of the wall,
now sneeze away, cough away, snuffle away all!
As the dry heaves before the wild hurricane fly
when they meet with nausea rise up to the sky.
So up to the rooftop his coursers they flea
sleigh full of toys and St. Nicholas, too.
And then in a twinkling, I heard on the roof,
the dancing and prancing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head and was turning around
down the chimney came St. Nicholas with a bound.
He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot
and his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot.
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back
as he clutched for his kerchief he yelled "Stand back!"
His eyes how they watered, his dimples weren't merry,
his cheeks were flushed, his nose beet-red like a cherry.
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bohe
beard on his chin was as white as the snow.
A stump of a thermometer he held clenched in his teeth
and the steam from a nebulizer encircled his head like a wreath.
He had a flushed face and was holding his belly
that shook when he coughed like a bowl full of jelly.
He was a right jolly old elf,
but I coughed and sneezed when I saw him in spite of myself.
The drainage of his eye and the way he was holding his head
soon gave me to know I had nothing to spread.
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work
and filled every stocking, then turned with a jerk.
And laying his finger alongside of his nose,
and trying to stifle another sneeze, up the chimney he rose.
He sprang to his sleigh and to his team gave a whistle
and away they all flew like the down on a thistle.
I heard him exclaim as he rode out of sight,
"May the flu leave Alaska before Christmas and to all a good night".

(with apologies to Clement C. Moore)