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Influenza Surveillance and Reporting Pediatric Influenza-Related Deaths

INTRODUCTION

The onset of influenza season is notoriously difficult to forecast, making effective surveillance an important tool for detecting the onset, severity, and duration of influenza in Alaska communities.

The 2003-2004 influenza season began earlier than usual, in October, and was more severe than the previous three seasons, both nationally and in Alaska.¹ Influenza-related mortality among children became a heightened concern,² prompting the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to ask states to report all influenza-associated deaths among children <18 years. As of July 2004, 152 laboratory-confirmed deaths in children were reported from 40 states, including one case from Alaska.³ Because pediatric influenza deaths were not reported to the CDC prior to the 2003-2004 season, comparisons with previous seasons were not possible.

NATIONAL SURVEILLANCE

The CDC has four long-standing influenza surveillance programs in place and recently added pediatric influenza-associated deaths as a nationally reportable condition:

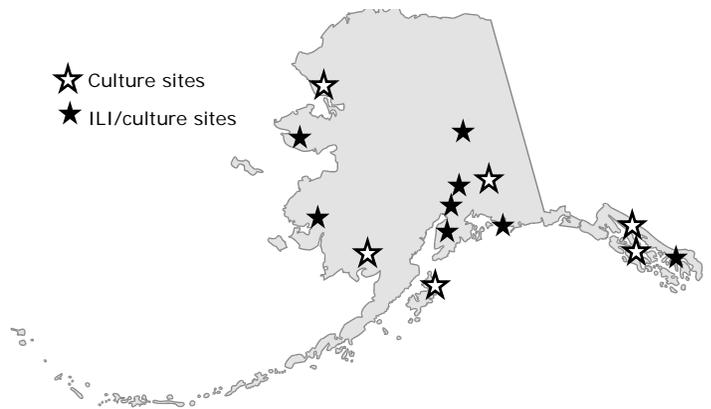
1. World Health Organization (WHO) and National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS) Collaborating Laboratories—a network of laboratories that serotype influenza isolates from regional laboratories.
2. U.S. Influenza Sentinel Providers Surveillance Network—a national network of providers who report the proportion of patients with influenza-like illness (ILI)*.
3. State and Territorial Epidemiologists Reports—State health departments estimate the level of influenza activity in their states each week.
4. 122 Cities Mortality Reporting System—Weekly reporting of the proportion of death certificates that list pneumonia or influenza as contributors of death.
5. **On September 16, 2004, influenza-associated deaths in children <18 years of age was added as a nationally reportable condition.** This ongoing surveillance will provide a better understanding of influenza mortality among children.

ALASKA SURVEILLANCE

The State of Alaska participates in all national surveillance programs except the 122 cities mortality reporting system. To do this, the Alaska Division of Public Health performs the following activities:

1. The Alaska State Virology Laboratory in Fairbanks submits influenza isolates to the WHO and NREVSS laboratories.
2. All laboratories providing services to Alaska health care facilities must report positive influenza culture and direct antigen test results to the Section of Epidemiology (7 Alaska Administrative Code 27.007).
3. Designated health care facilities/providers around the state perform influenza culture surveillance through the Alaska Virology Laboratory in Fairbanks (Figure 1). Many of these sites provide surveillance during the summer months as well.
4. Designated health care facilities/providers around the state perform ILI surveillance in addition to influenza culture surveillance (Figure 1).

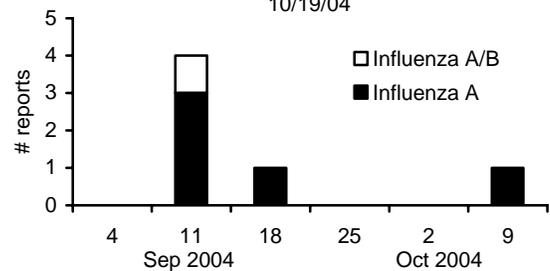
Figure 1: Alaska Influenza Sentinel Surveillance Sites



2004-2005 INFLUENZA SEASON ACTIVITY IN ALASKA

Between September 5 - 16, 2004, five positive rapid influenza antigen tests were reported (Figure 2). Three were from Anchorage, one from Fairbanks and one from a tourist on a cruise ship who was seen in Ketchikan. To date, the Alaska Virology Laboratory has reported one positive influenza A (H3) culture submitted October 4 from Anchorage.

Figure 2: Laboratory-confirmed Influenza Reports: 10/19/04



Weekly updates of State influenza activity can be found at <http://www.epi.alaska.gov/id/influenza/influenza.jsp>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **All health care providers should report suspected or confirmed influenza-associated pediatric deaths to Section of Epidemiology** at 907-269-8000 (normal business hours) or after hours 1-800-478-0084. If additional laboratory confirmation is needed, Epidemiology will facilitate sending specimens to the State and CDC laboratories.
2. Laboratories providing services to Alaska health care facilities should report all positive influenza test results to the Section of Epidemiology.
3. Viral culture transport media can be obtained from the State Virology Lab in Fairbanks at 907-474-7017. Influenza cultures are free of charge.

References

1. CDC. Update: Influenza Activity – United State and Worldwide, 2003-04 Season, and Composition of the 2004-05 Influenza Vaccine. *MMWR* 2004;53:547-552.
2. CDC. Update: influenza-associated deaths reported among children aged <18 years – United States, 2003-04 influenza season. *MMWR* 2004; 52:1286-8.
3. Section of Epidemiology. Influenza Update: Surveillance, a Pediatric Death, and Expanded Vaccine Guidelines. *Epidemiology Bulletin*, January 24, 2004, No. 1.

*ILI is defined as fever $\geq 100^{\circ}$ F and either cough or sore throat.