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INFLUENZA SURVEILLANCE

We would like to encourage all Health Care Providers to keep a sharp lookout for patients with illnesses compatible with influenza. We encourage the early and prompt reporting of any suspect influenza outbreaks. In past years the Section of Communicable Disease Control has conducted extensive statewide influenza surveillance programs. Analysis of these programs has indicated that the most sensitive indicator of the presence of influenza in the State of Alaska is the reporting of outbreaks of upper respiratory illness in children or adults. Private physicians have been responsible for the early and accurate reporting of influenza outbreaks which has enabled us to obtain viral culture specimens to document which influenza strains are causing illness in the community.

As reported in previous Bulletins, isolates of influenza virus have already been obtained in the past month. Isolation of influenza virus so early in the season is unusual in Alaska and may portend widespread outbreaks of influenza throughout the state in the 1980-81 influenza season.

Outbreaks of upper respiratory illness or suspected influenza cases should be reported to Dr. John Middaugh, State Epidemiologist, Section of Communicable Disease Control, Anchorage, 272-7534.

REYE SYNDROME AND ASPIRIN

The Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia, has recently reported the results of three new studies which suggest a relationship between Reye syndrome and salicylates (i.e., aspirin) taken during an associated antecedent illness.

“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 has 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 illnesses, particularly chickenpox and influenza-like illnesses.”

(MMWR 1980; 29: 532-539.)