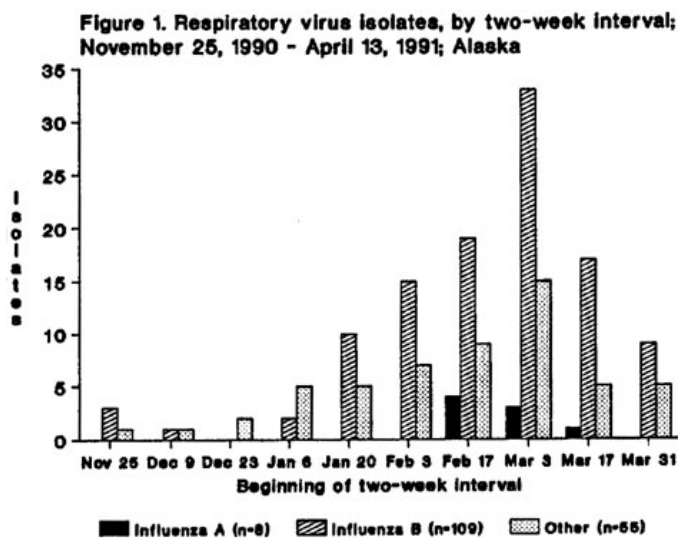




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Influenza in Alaska, 1990 - 1991

Influenza activity in Alaska during the current season began in September 1990 but did not peak until March 1991, relatively late in the season (Figure 1; September case not shown). The first culture-confirmed case, a resident of Kodiak, was identified on September 10. Although numerous pharyngeal specimens from patients throughout the state continued to be submitted for viral culture, no additional respiratory viruses were isolated at the State Public Health Laboratory-Fairbanks until late November, when influenza B and other respiratory viruses were found to be circulating.



The majority of culture-confirmed influenza cases were type B: Of 118 influenza virus isolates, 109 (92%) were type B and 9 (8%) were type A. One hundred (92%) of these isolates could be fully characterized. All serotyped influenza virus isolates (Table 1) were identical to one of the three inactivated antigens contained in the 1990-91 influenza vaccine formulation.

In mid-March, an outbreak of acute respiratory illness occurred in King Cove with absenteeism reaching over 35% at the public school. Pharyngeal swabs collected from ill individuals by the nurse practitioner in King Cove yielded B/Victoria/2/87-like virus. During February and March, the Section of Epidemiology also received reports of increased absenteeism at schools in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and other communities.

Influenza surveillance in Alaska is conducted with the help of physicians and other health care providers who submit throat swabs from patients with flu-like symptoms to one of the State Public Health Laboratories. Surveillance for influenza and other respiratory viruses enables health care providers to

accurately diagnose the cause(s) of acute viral respiratory syndrome among their patients. In addition, characterization of influenza virus isolates provides information about the distribution of influenza A, for which amantadine prophylaxis in selected patients may be effective.

The Section of Epidemiology encourages primary care physicians and other health care providers to participate in the surveillance program. Alaska's three State Public Health Laboratories (Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Juneau) supply viral transport media to all health care providers who request it; the Fairbanks laboratory processes all viral culture specimens. **These services are free of charge.**

Influenza vaccine recommendations will be published in an *Epidemiology Bulletin* before the beginning of the 1991-92 season. Based on global surveillance of influenza activity, the Food and Drug Administration Vaccine Advisory Panel recently recommended that vaccine be reformulated for the 1991-92 season to contain A/Taiwan/1/86-like, A/Beijing/353/89-like, and B/Panama/45/90-like inactivated viruses.

Table 1. Respiratory viruses identified by Public Health Laboratory, Alaska; 1990-1991.

Influenza	Number
A/Taiwan/1/86-like	4
Not typable	5
Influenza B:	
B/Yamagata/16/88-like	51
B/Victoria/2/87-like	45
Not typable	13
Other:	
Respiratory syncytial virus	19
Parainfluenza	15
Rhinovirus	9
Adenovirus	7
Other	5

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