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Maine Health Alert Network (HAN) System

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To: All HAN recipients
From: Dr. Siiri Bennett, State Epidemiologist
Subject: **Influenza Season Continues with Widespread Activity in Maine**
Date / Time: Thursday, April 04, 2019 at 2:15pm
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Abstract:

Influenza activity remains elevated and widespread in Maine and throughout the United States. Influenza should continue to be considered as a possible diagnosis for patients with influenza-like illness, including a fever of 100°F or higher and a cough or sore throat. Maine CDC recommends rapid antiviral treatment of high-risk patients with suspected influenza.

With sustained influenza activity, it is not too late to get vaccinated for the 2018-19 influenza season. Vaccination can reduce illness and prevent hospitalizations and death.

Influenza Season Continues with Widespread Activity in Maine

Summary:

Influenza activity remains elevated in Maine and throughout the United States. Influenza should continue to be considered as a possible diagnosis for patients with influenza-like illness, including a fever of 100°F or higher and a cough or sore throat. Maine CDC recommends rapid antiviral treatment of high-risk patients with suspected influenza. With sustained influenza activity, it is not too late to get vaccinated for the 2018-19 influenza season. Vaccination can reduce illness and prevent hospitalization and death.

Background:

On March 28, 2019, federal CDC released a health advisory titled “Influenza Season Continues with an Increase in Influenza A(H3N2) Activity” notifying clinicians that influenza activity remains high in the United States. This health alert can be found at <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00419.asp>. Though Maine does not follow the trend of increased influenza A(H3N2) activity, Maine continues to experience elevated levels of influenza A(H1N1) and increasing levels of influenza B throughout the state. Maine has reported widespread influenza activity since January 29, 2019, meaning increased influenza-like illness and laboratory-confirmed influenza in more than half the regions of the state.

Recommendations:

- **Prevention:** Maine CDC recommends following the “No Flu 4 You” guidelines which include:
 - **Wash your hands:** Both the general public and healthcare providers should remember to wash their hands frequently to prevent transmission of influenza
 - **Cover your cough:** Use tissues, or cough into your sleeve
 - **Stay home when you are sick:** Symptomatic individuals should remain home until 24 hours after fever resolves without the use of medications
 - **Get Vaccinated:** It is not too late to get vaccinated. Maine CDC recommends vaccination for everyone aged 6 months and older, especially for those people who are at high risk of serious complications from influenza. Influenza vaccine is provided at no-cost by the state of Maine for children under the age of 19 years. For questions about vaccination please contact the Maine Immunization Program at 800-867-4775 or through immunizeme@maine.gov.
- **Diagnostic Testing:** Maine CDC recommends that healthcare providers consider influenza testing for patients with influenza-like illness (defined as fever of 100° F or greater with cough or sore throat, in the absence of another known cause) who are hospitalized, who have died, or for whom a diagnosis of influenza would affect clinical care, infection control, or management of contacts.

Influenza testing is available free of charge through Maine’s Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL). Requisition forms and submission requirements are available at mainepublichealth.gov/lab.

- **Treatment:** Tamiflu (oseltamivir), Relenza (zanamivir), Rapivab (peramivir), and Xofluza (baloxavir) are approved antivirals for influenza. Treatment should begin as soon as possible. Guidance for use of Antivirals for the Treatment and Chemoprophylaxis of Influenza are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/summary-clinicians.htm>

Clinicians are reminded to treat suspected influenza in high-risk outpatients, those with progressive disease, and all hospitalized patients with antiviral medications as soon as possible, regardless of negative rapid influenza diagnostic test results and without waiting for RT-PCR testing results. Early antiviral treatment works best, but treatment may offer benefit when started up to 4-5 days after symptom onset in hospitalized patients. Early antiviral treatment can reduce influenza morbidity and mortality.

- **Reporting:** All influenza outbreaks, laboratory confirmed influenza hospitalizations, and pediatric influenza deaths are reportable to Maine CDC. Maine CDC also appreciates reports of laboratory confirmed influenza (including rapid positives) but particularly:
 - **any** suspicion of influenza among persons who have died
 - **any** laboratory-confirmed influenza associated with an outbreak

Reports can be provided to Maine CDC by fax at 207-287-8186 or by phone at 1-800-821-5821.

For more information:

- Maine CDC's influenza webpage: www.maineflu.gov
- Federal CDC's influenza webpage: www.cdc.gov/flu
- Maine's weekly surveillance reports: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/influenza/influenza-surveillance-weekly-updates.shtml>