

Rise in Influenza Activity: Physicians Encouraged to Continue to Provide Influenza Vaccinations

Over the last several weeks, Toronto Public Health (TPH) has noted a marked rise in influenza activity. To date, 515 laboratory confirmed cases of influenza have been reported which is higher than expected for this time of year (comparable 5-year-season-to-date average is 81 cases). As seen in previous influenza seasons, higher rates of infection are being reported among children less than four years of age and those older than 65 years. As of January 1, there have been 4 reported deaths and 79 hospitalizations.

Ninety-eight percent of the reported cases are influenza A: 56% are H3, 4% are the pandemic (H1N1) subtype, and 37% have no subtype information available, but presumably the majority of these are H3. The influenza vaccine for the 2010/11 season contains A/California/7/2009 (H1N1) (the pandemic H1N1 strain), A/Perth/16/2009 (H3N2) and B/Brisbane/60/2008 strains.

Seasonal influenza typically persists until March, and the predominant circulating strain (H3N2) is contained in the vaccine. **Therefore, TPH is encouraging physicians to continue to vaccinate patients.** All individuals aged six months or older who live, work or attend school in Ontario, and have no contraindications are encouraged to receive the publicly funded vaccine.

Patients with influenza-like illness should be advised to stay home from work or school while ill, and to practice frequent hand hygiene and cough etiquette. Patients hospitalized with acute respiratory infection should be tested for influenza.

The Ontario Government Pharmaceutical and Medical Supply Services (OGPMSS) still has influenza vaccine available for physicians to order. To order vaccine fax your order form to 416-327-0818 or call the OGPMSS customer service line at 416-327-0837.

There are still opportunities to attend one of the TPH community Flu Shot clinics in January. See <http://www.toronto.ca/health/flu/index.htm> for more information and a patient fact sheet on influenza and the influenza vaccine.

For more information please call the Toronto Public Health Immunization Information Line at 416-392-1250 and ask to speak to a nurse.

web-site: <http://www.toronto.ca/health/cdc/surveillance>

E-mail: cdsu@toronto.ca