



Clinical Advisory

1. Information about the New Influenza A(H3N2) Variant Virus 2. Increased Surveillance for Influenza A(H3N2)v Virus Infections Particularly in Young Children (Elementary School Age and Younger)

January 11, 2012

As you may already know, over the past several months the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has confirmed human infection with a novel strain of influenza A H3N2 virus (referred to as influenza A(H3N2)v for “variant”) in 12 people across 5 states: West Virginia, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Maine, and Iowa. Formerly called swine-origin triple reassortant influenza A(H3N2), it is an influenza virus that contains genes from human, avian and swine origins. Investigations of these cases revealed human infections with these viruses following contact with swine as well as limited human-to-human transmission.

Eleven of the 12 recent cases were in children. Three of the 12 were hospitalized. All twelve have recovered fully. Six of the 12 had an identified recent exposure to swine; six did not have an identified exposure to swine. **No infections due to this novel influenza strain have been reported in Massachusetts to date, but we want to raise our level of alertness.**

At this time, the strain has not been shown to cause severe influenza-like illness (ILI)¹. To date, the novel strain is sensitive to both oseltamivir and zanamivir and resistant to the amantadine and rimantadine. The median age is 3 years (range 11 months-58 years). This indicates that children, primarily elementary school age or younger, may have increased susceptibility to this strain (CDC, [Interim Guidance for Influenza Surveillance](#), December 2011). Therefore, we are requesting your assistance to enhance influenza surveillance in Massachusetts in an effort to detect activity of the novel H3N2v flu strain in Massachusetts.

We ask that clinicians immediately report the following influenza-related cases by phone to the Division of Epidemiology and Immunization 617-983-6800 and to your local board of health. This applies to all strains of influenza:

New!

- ☎ [Clusters of ILI or acute respiratory illness \(ARI\)² in daycare and elementary schools](#)
- ☎ [Patients with unusual or severe presentations of ILI or ARI, especially young children](#)
- ☎ [Influenza-like illness in employees of commercial swine farms](#)
- ☎ Deaths related to influenza in children under 18 and in pregnant women
- ☎ ICU admissions of pregnant women with influenza
- ☎ Confirmed cases of influenza with encephalopathy, myocarditis, or pericarditis
- ☎ Case(s) or clusters of influenza-like illness (ILI) in long-term care facilities or in high risk settings
- ☎ Cases of antiviral treatment or prophylaxis failure
- ☎ Suspect novel influenza, typically travel-associated (e.g., avian influenza)

When you call, we may request that you collect and submit specimens to the Hinton State Laboratory for testing. Testing can differentiate between seasonal influenza viruses and novel influenza viruses like influenza A (H3N2)v which may be circulating.

At this time, the infectious period of the variant flu strain is unknown, but it is assumed to be similar to the infectious period of seasonal influenza. Therefore, infected persons should be

assumed to be contagious up to 7 days from illness onset. Younger persons and immunocompromised persons may be contagious longer.

Control measures and antiviral treatment and prophylaxis for this variant are the same as for seasonal influenza. CDC data to date indicate that seasonal vaccines may provide limited protection against infection with A(H3N2)v viruses among adults and little to no protection in young children. While the effectiveness of current seasonal vaccines to protect against A(H3N2)v virus infections may be reduced compared with effectiveness of seasonal vaccines against seasonal influenza, CDC recommends that healthcare workers, swine workers and the general public continue to receive seasonal flu vaccine.

CDC has a more detailed information available concerning these viruses on their web site. See the list of topics and associated links below.

Information on Variant Influenza A Viruses:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/influenza-variant-viruses.htm>

Prevention Strategies for Seasonal and Influenza A (H3N2)v Infections Healthcare Settings: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/prevention-strategies.htm>

2011-2012 Influenza Antiviral Treatment Recommendations:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/>

Interim Guidance for Influenza Surveillance: Collection of Additional Specimens:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/h3n2v-surveillance.htm>

Interim Guidance on Collection, Processing and Testing for Patients with Suspect Influenza A (H3N2)v Infections: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/h3n2v-testing.htm>

Interim Guidance for Workers on Commercial Swine Farms: Preventing the Spread:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/guidance-commercial-pigs.htm>

Fact Sheet: What People who Raise Pigs Need to Know about Influenza:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/people-raise-pigs-flu.htm>

CDC "What's New?" site for a list of what's been updated or added about flu:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/whatsnew.htm>

FluView Weekly Surveillance Report: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/>

For questions and concerns, or to report any of the influenza-related conditions listed above, please call 617-983-6800. The Weekly Flu Report for Massachusetts is posted on the MDPH web site at <http://publichealth.blog.state.ma.us/h1n1-swine-flu/>.

¹ **Influenza-like illness:** fever of 100° F or greater with cough or sore throat

² **Acute respiratory illness:** recent onset of at least two of the following:

- Rhinorrhea or nasal congestion
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Fever or feverishness