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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To: All HAN Recipients
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Subject: Influenza Arrives in Maine
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Influenza Arrives in Maine

The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) has received several reports of positive influenza laboratory results during recent weeks. Maine CDC is requesting that laboratories send respiratory specimens from influenza confirmed or suspect patients to Maine's Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL) for subtyping, especially in the beginning of influenza season. Subtyping allows Maine CDC to determine which influenza viruses are circulating this season and detect novel influenza virus infections.

Novel influenza A viruses cause human infection but are different from current seasonal human influenza A viruses that circulate among people. In August 2022, U.S. CDC reported 5 cases of human variant virus infection, or viruses that typically circulate in swine, and avian influenza H5N1 continues to circulate in wild and domestic birds. Though the risk to humans remains low, healthcare providers should be aware and test symptomatic patients with risk factors such as swine, agriculture, and avian exposures for influenza. HETL is the only laboratory in Maine that can identify novel influenza, therefore, all influenza A positive specimens from people with these exposures should be sent to HETL for further evaluation.

Maine's 2022–2023 influenza surveillance season will officially begin on October 2, 2022. Though seasonal influenza activity in the United States remains low, both influenza A and B viruses are currently circulating nationally. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get vaccinated for influenza each influenza season, and ideally by the end of October.

Maine CDC is hosting a **“Start of the 2022–2023 Influenza Season”** Zoom call on **Wednesday, September 28, 2022, at 2:00 PM**. This call will provide updates for the season, outline available resources, and remind facilities about reporting requirements. This call is particularly relevant for infection practitioners, providers, laboratorians, employee health, emergency preparedness, hospital administration, and long-term care facilities. A Zoom link will be sent out prior to the meeting via the HAN system.

Recommendations for this influenza season

Diagnosis: Symptoms of influenza and other respiratory diseases can be similar, making it difficult to diagnose based on symptoms alone. Testing may be needed. Clinicians should consider influenza in the differential diagnosis of febrile respiratory illnesses in patients of any age. Clinicians should encourage their patients to be immunized against influenza in the 2022–2023 influenza season if they have not already done so and should review updated recommendations of the use of antiviral medications for influenza prophylaxis and treatment.

Treatment: Oseltamivir, zanamivir, peramivir, and baloxavir are currently recommended for treatment. Oseltamivir, zanamivir, and baloxavir are also recommended for prophylaxis. Providers will be notified through the Health Alert Network if national recommendations for treatment and prophylaxis are revised.

Laboratory: Influenza testing through HETL is always free of charge. Instructions on submitting specimens for influenza testing can be found at www.maine.gov/dhhs/lis. Maine CDC is requesting that diagnostic laboratories and other willing facilities forward positive specimens to HETL for confirmatory PCR and subtyping, especially in the beginning of influenza season.

Reporting: Infection preventionists, laboratorians, clinicians, school nurses, and other reporting entities must report:

- laboratory-confirmed influenza hospitalizations,
- Influenza-associated deaths in persons younger than 18 years old
- suspected outbreaks of influenza

to Maine CDC by phone at 1-800-821-5821 or by fax at 1-800-293-7534. Maine CDC appreciates all reports of positive influenza tests by any testing method either through electronic laboratory reporting, phone (1-800-821-5821), or fax (1-800-293-7534).

Vaccination: Vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza. Maine CDC and U.S. CDC recommend all individuals ages 6 months and older be immunized, even if they were vaccinated for influenza last season. Influenza vaccine is available in Maine and can be located at <https://www.vaccines.gov/find-vaccines/>.

Prevention: As we enter the influenza season, it is important to remember the [*No Flu 4 You*](#) guidelines to help prevent illness: wash your hands; cover your cough; stay home when you're sick; and get vaccinated.

Additional Information

- Information and recommendations on influenza for health professionals <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals>
- Information on the differences between Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19 <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>
- National influenza surveillance information <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/>
- Maine influenza surveillance information www.maineinfluenza.gov