

Public Health Update

September 2004

Preventing Widespread Influenza: Influenza Surveillance Activities 2004

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This Public Health Update contains information on activities related to preventing widespread or pandemic influenza at the national, state, and local levels. This includes information on the National Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan and on the new active influenza surveillance system being set up at the local level. It also includes information on new influenza vaccination guidelines and on influenza prevention strategies for long-term care facilities.

Influenza-related activities at the national level:

Last year, Colorado and much of the U.S. experienced an earlier onset of the influenza season, along with an increased severity of influenza-related illnesses. This year, Canada has already seen a number of influenza outbreaks in long-term care facilities that have occurred as early as mid-August. Heightened concerns over last year's influenza season and recent international outbreaks of avian influenza have culminated in a new national plan for influenza pandemic preparedness. This plan hopes to address issues of surveillance, vaccine and medication shortages, as well as clinical resources that may become important in the event of an influenza pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also created Flu Surge, a spreadsheet-based computer program that will allow hospitals and public health officials to estimate surges in demand for hospital-based services during the next influenza pandemic.

More information on the [National Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan](http://www.dhhs.gov/nvpo/pandemicplan/) can be found at <http://www.dhhs.gov/nvpo/pandemicplan/>.

Information on Flu Surge can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/flusurge.htm>.



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Influenza-related activities at the state level:

At the state level, recent changes have been made to the influenza surveillance system. For the past several years, the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment has had enhanced surveillance of influenza, through mandatory reporting of all influenza cases from laboratories and health care providers. However, the Colorado Board of Health has recently decided to discontinue this practice. As of October 1, 2004, only hospitalized influenza cases and pediatric deaths will be reported, as opposed to all influenza cases. Generally, by the time hospitalizations and deaths occur, influenza has moved well beyond its initial stage of entry into a community and has become entrenched in the population. Thus, this change in reporting practices will make it more difficult to recognize influenza's initial point of entry into the community and to identify influenza strains early on. Early recognition and identification of influenza would enable more effective public health interventions, like early vaccination or anti-influenza medications, to prevent extensive spread of the disease. Therefore, the Tri-County Health Department would like to continue surveillance of influenza at the local level, in order to recognize early cases of influenza in the community.

New active influenza surveillance system at the local level:

The Tri-County Health Department is requesting reports of all test-positive influenza cases from selected hospitals and laboratories within the Tri-County jurisdiction, as of October 1, 2004. This pertains to any cases with positive influenza test results that are identified through emergency rooms, clinics, and laboratories. During the early part of the influenza season, the Tri-County Health Department will be collecting information on the demographics, address, and type of laboratory test used for each case. A designated person at the Tri-County Health Department will be available to take reports on influenza via phone or fax, and will also call selected hospitals and laboratories on a weekly basis to inquire about any new cases. These active surveillance calls will only be continued through the first few weeks of the influenza season, to identify influenza's initial points of entry into the community. Hopefully, these active surveillance efforts at the local level will allow rapid identification of influenza and enable quick preventive action, through vaccines, prophylactic medications, and educational measures, to prevent a pandemic situation.

Although there are no longer any mandatory reporting requirements, we urge your assistance in our public health efforts to prevent widespread influenza. The Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment has given us its full support in this endeavor, and we hope that you will support us as well.

Preventing influenza: current guidelines on who should get vaccinated

Please be aware that the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the CDC have made some new recommendations this year regarding the influenza vaccine.

The ACIP has the following new recommendations:

- All healthy children aged 6--23 months should be vaccinated if possible
- Close contacts of children aged 0--23 months should be vaccinated if possible
- Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season should be vaccinated - vaccination can occur in any trimester
- Inactivated vaccine is preferred over live, attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) for vaccinating severely immunosuppressed individuals as well as for household members, health-care workers, and others who have close contact with severely immunosuppressed persons.

CDC also recommends yearly influenza vaccine for the following people:

- People aged 50 years or older
- Nursing home residents and other long-term care facility residents
- Adults and children \geq 6 months of age who have chronic heart or lung conditions, such as asthma;
- Adults and children \geq 6 months of age who need regular medical care or have been hospitalized because of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, chronic kidney disease, or weak immune systems (including immune deficiencies caused by medications, cancer, or HIV)
- Children (over 6 months old) and teenagers who are on long-term aspirin therapy and therefore could develop Reye Syndrome after the flu
- Health care workers, emergency response workers/first responders, and employees of hospitals, nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and home care providers
- Household members of people in high-risk groups (including children)

Influenza vaccine should be avoided in people with:

- Severe egg allergy
- History of severe reaction to the vaccine in the past,
- History of Guillain-Barre Syndrome within 6 weeks of getting the vaccine in the past.

More information on national vaccine recommendations can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5306a1.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/flu/who.htm>

**For more information on influenza vaccine clinics within
your community, please contact
The Colorado Influenza and Pneumococcal Alert
Coalition (CIPAC):**

**Call 1-888-692-0269
and ask about an influenza vaccine clinic in your area.**

**Or go to the CIPAC website at
<http://www.immunizecolorado.com/>
and click on "Find a Flu Clinic"
to find an influenza vaccine clinic in your area.**

For more information on influenza vaccines and prevention, please contact

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment:
(303) 692-2700 / (303) 370-9395 (after hours)
Fax: (303) 782-0338

Tri-County Health Department:
(303) 220-9200 / 303-461-2342 (after hours)
Fax: (303) 220-9208

Preventing influenza in high-risk groups: nursing homes and long-term care facilities

General prevention strategies:

People who live in nursing homes and long-term care facilities have a higher risk of getting serious influenza-related complications that can lead to death. Preventing influenza is extremely important in these high-risk groups. Some basic prevention techniques include:

- Influenza vaccination every fall
- Frequent hand-washing
- Avoiding close contact with sick people
- Covering the mouth and nose when sneezing
- Avoiding touching the mouth, nose, or eyes

Note: It is important that all employees of long-term care facilities receive the influenza vaccine. It is also important that staff members stay at home when they are sick. Otherwise, they may put the nursing home residents at risk for contracting influenza.

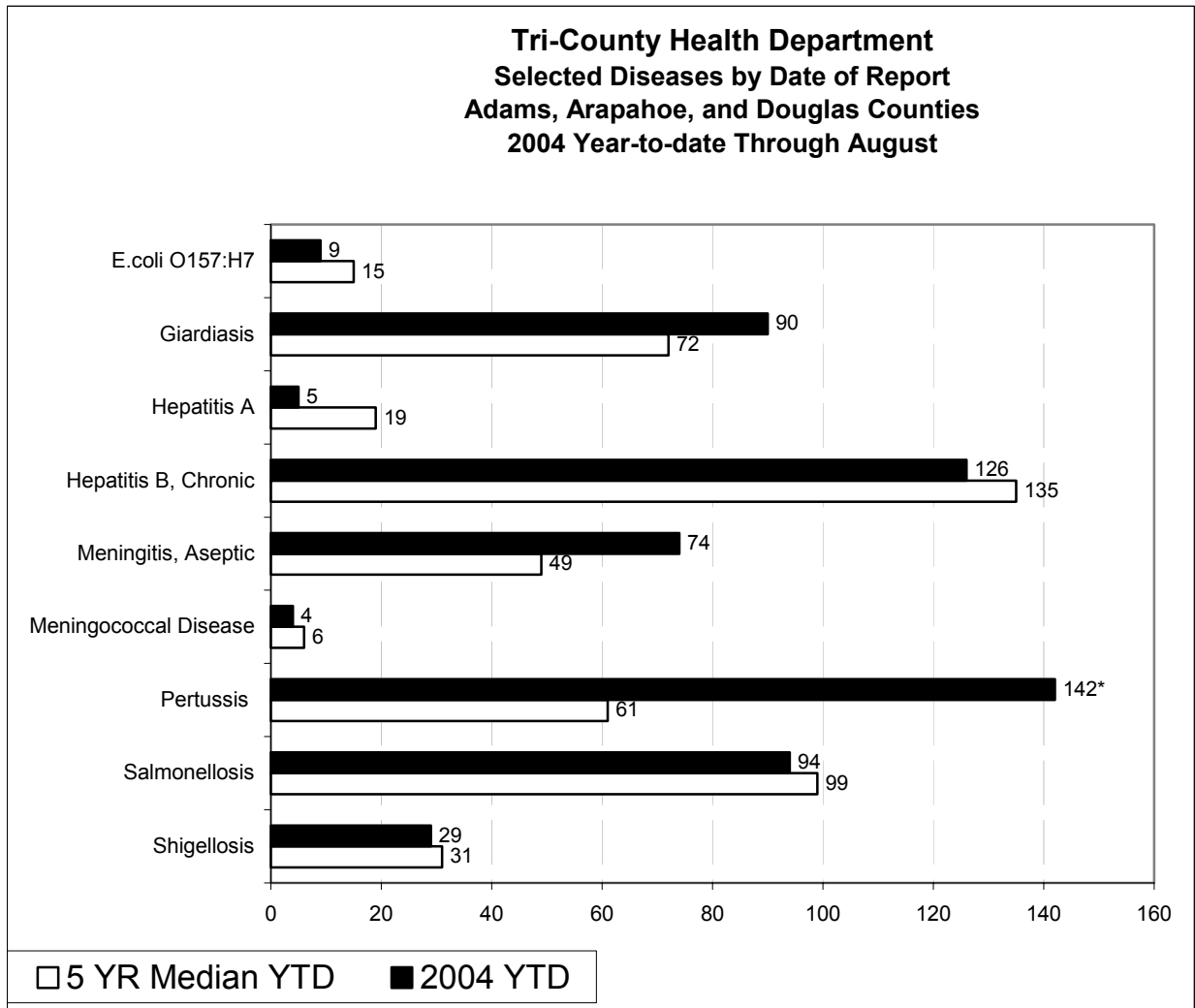
To find out more about hand washing and other influenza prevention strategies, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>

In the event of an influenza outbreak:

If an outbreak occurs in a nursing home or long-term care facility, anti-influenza medications can be used to prevent flu among close contacts. Three prescription drugs (amantadine, rimantadine, and oseltamivir) are approved for use in preventing influenza. In the event of a nursing home outbreak, residents and staff members can be given a combination of influenza vaccine and anti-influenza medications to prevent illness. The medications are continued until the vaccine takes effect (which takes about two weeks). To find out more about the use of medications to prevent influenza, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/antiviral/>.

If an influenza outbreak does occur, please contact your state or local health department immediately. Cases of influenza that occur early in the influenza season (September and October) should also be reported to your local health department. The state of Colorado's guidelines for prevention and control of nursing home influenza outbreaks can be found at:

<http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/hf/download/INFLUENZA2004.pdf>



*There have been a high number of pertussis cases reported thus far this year. This increase began in the month of March and continues through the present. We are expecting numbers to rise as children are returning to school. Our next Public Health Update will focus on this issue. Please remind your patients to keep updated on their childhood immunizations!