

Communicable Disease Advisory: Increasing incidence of Influenza A/H3N2

From the office of the North Zone Medical Officers of Health

April 05, 2019

Context:

The Public Health Agency of Canada noted an increase in influenza A/H3N2 activity across the country that may represent a second wave of influenza activity this season, the peak of which is not yet known. As we approach the end of “seasonal” influenza activity for 2018-2019, AHS Public Health continues to routinely monitor influenza trends within the Province. The influenza season in Alberta started early in the fall of 2018, with influenza A/H1N1 (pdm09) as the predominant strain. However, influenza A/H1N1 activity has been steadily decreasing since early February 2019, along with an accompanying increase in the number of influenza A/H3N2 cases. Influenza outbreak activity in facilities across the province also continues to occur. Detailed information on influenza patterns in Alberta is updated weekly and can be found at <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/services/Page13524.aspx>.

This year’s influenza vaccine effectiveness was 72% for influenza A H1N1 strain and 68% for all influenza. The annual influenza immunization program ended on March 31, 2019, with the exception of children who require a second dose of influenza vaccine. Eligible children will be able to receive this second dose of influenza vaccine up to and including April 30, 2019 at their local public health offices. More information about influenza immunization and eligibility for second doses can be found at <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/influenza/influenza.aspx>.

Medical Officers of Health can still access influenza vaccine in the event of an influenza outbreak as required after this end date.

Actions:

- Routine infection control practices are important – both as guidance to your patients as well as part of your routine business practice (e.g. early identification of symptomatic individuals and providing masks for ill patients to prevent spread to other patients). Remind your patients to cover their cough, practice good hand hygiene and to stay home if they are sick. Follow these practices yourself as well and support your staff in doing the same. Information on the infection control recommendations to prevent spread of influenza illness can be found at <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page6410.aspx>.
- Consider early use of antiviral medications for treatment in high risk patients – Influenza can be a serious infection sometimes leading to hospitalization and death, particularly for elderly persons, persons with chronic underlying medical conditions and pregnant women. For general guidance around the use of **antiviral therapies for the management of influenza**, please refer to https://www.ammi.ca/Content/Guidelines/Flu_Algorithm.pdf.
- Provide prescriptions as appropriate for prophylactic antiviral medications in facility outbreaks – the Medical Officer of Health may recommend prophylaxis for residents and staff of facility living sites where there is a confirmed influenza outbreak. AHS recommendations for influenza outbreak management and prophylaxis can be found at <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/medstaff/Page7082.aspx>
- Testing for influenza virus – Nasopharyngeal swab or aspirate, or throat swab in Universal Transport Medium (UTM). Information on testing recommendations for influenza virus can be found on the ProvLab website in the Guide to Services at <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/lab/Page14608.aspx>

If you have further questions, please contact the North Zone Medical Officer of Health as per below.

This letter will be posted on <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/medstaff/Page7082.aspx>