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Maine Health Alert Network (HAN) System

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To: All HAN Recipients
From: Dr. Isaac Benowitz, State Epidemiologist
Subject: **Elevated Influenza Activity in Maine**
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Elevated Influenza Activity in Maine

Summary: Influenza activity is increasing in all 16 counties in Maine. Maine CDC's Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL) has confirmed that influenza A/pH1N1, influenza A/H3, and influenza B/Victoria are currently circulating in Maine. Influenza vaccination is the best way to prevent illness. It is not too late to get influenza vaccine. Vaccination is strongly encouraged throughout the season, and vaccines are widely available.

Background: Maine CDC first received reports of laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza in September. Though influenza A/pH1N1 and influenza B/Victoria have been identified, the majority of subtyped virus in Maine is influenza A/H3. Laboratory-confirmed cases, hospitalizations, and reports of outbreaks have rapidly increased over the past several weeks.

Recommendations:

- **Prevention:** Maine CDC recommends the following:
 - **Get Vaccinated:** Maine CDC recommends vaccination for everyone aged 6 months and older, especially for those people who are at high risk of serious complications from influenza. Influenza vaccine is available at no-cost by the State of Maine for children under the age of 19 years. Vaccine is still available through health care providers and many local pharmacies. People are considered fully vaccinated 14 days after vaccination. For questions about vaccination please contact the Maine Immunization Program at 800-867-4775 or through immunizeme@maine.gov.
 - **Take every day preventative actions:**
 - **Wash your hands.** Both the general public and health care providers should remember to wash their hands with soap and water frequently to prevent transmission of influenza.
 - **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** Use tissues, or cough into your sleeve or elbow.
 - **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.** If you are at high risk for complications, you may choose to avoid large crowds.

- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.** Influenza and other germs can spread this way.
 - **Clean and disinfect.** Clean surfaces and objects that may be contaminated.
 - **Stay home when you are sick.** Symptomatic individuals should remain home until they have had no fever for 24 hours without the use of medications.
- **Diagnostic Testing:** Maine CDC recommends that health care providers consider influenza testing for patients with influenza-like illness (defined as fever of 100° F or greater with cough or sore throat) who are hospitalized, who have died, or for whom a diagnosis of influenza would affect clinical care, infection control, or management of contacts.
 - Influenza testing is available free of charge through HETL. Requisition forms and submission requirements are available at mainepublichealth.gov/lab.
 - HETL requests that laboratories send their first 10 influenza positive specimens for further characterization. It is not necessary to send specimens beyond the first 10 positives, however, any suspect novel, or untypable influenza strains, must be sent to HETL for confirmation. For all influenza specimens sent to HETL, please include SARS-CoV-2 result on the HETL form, if performed.
 - **Treatment:** Tamiflu (oseltamivir), Relenza (zanamivir), Rapivab (peramivir), and Xofluza (baloxavir) are approved antivirals for influenza. Treatment should begin as soon as possible. Updated guidance for use of antivirals for the treatment and chemoprophylaxis of influenza is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/summary-clinicians.htm>.
 - Treat suspected influenza with antiviral medications, as soon as possible, in high-risk outpatients, those with progressive disease, and all hospitalized patients, *regardless of negative rapid influenza diagnostic test results* and without waiting for RT-PCR testing results.
 - For outpatients with uncomplicated influenza, treatment may be warranted and should be based on clinical judgement. Early antiviral treatment works best.
 - Treating hospitalized patients may offer benefit when started up to 4–5 days after symptom onset.
 - **Reporting:** All influenza outbreaks, laboratory confirmed influenza hospitalizations, and pediatric influenza deaths are required to be reported to Maine CDC. Maine CDC also appreciates reports of laboratory confirmed influenza, including positive point-of-care test results.

Reports can be provided to Maine CDC through electronic laboratory reporting, by fax at 207-287-8186, or by phone at 1-800-821-5821. Provider reporting is an essential component of influenza surveillance which is necessary to monitor the magnitude and severity of influenza in the state.

Weekly influenza surveillance reports are available at: www.maine.gov/dhhs/flu/weekly.

For more information:

- Maine CDC influenza webpage: www.maine.cdc.gov
- U.S. CDC influenza webpage: www.cdc.gov/flu