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Region IV Public Health
Clark, Cowlitz, Skamania, Wahkiakum counties
and Cowlitz Tribe

Health Advisory

Please deliver a copy of the accompanying alert to each provider in your organization.

Thank you

Questions regarding this alert may be
directed to the office of:

Alan Melnick, MD, MPH
Health Officer

Clark County Public Health
Cowlitz County Health Department
Skamania County Health Department
Wahkiakum County Department of Health and Human Services
(360) 397-8412

Please Distribute

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for specific incident for situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.

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HEALTH ADVISORY
August 3, 2012

TO: Physicians and other Healthcare Providers

FROM: Alan Melnick, MD, MPH, CPH, Health Officer

RE: Increase in Influenza A H3N2v virus infections in three U.S. states

The CDC has issued a health advisory concerning an increase in Influenza A H3N2v virus infections in three U.S. states. The following information for providers is excerpted from that advisory. The full advisory includes recommendations for the public and can be seen at http://content.govdelivery.com/bulletins/gd/USCDC-4d0783.

Current Situation

Multiple infections with variant* influenza A (H3N2v) viruses have been identified in 3 states in recent weeks. From July 12 through August 3, 2012, 16 cases of H3N2v were reported and confirmed by CDC. This virus was first detected in humans in July 2011. It has also been isolated in U.S. swine in many U.S. states. Since July 12, 2011, there have been 29 cases of H3N2v virus infection, including the 16 cases occurring in the last three weeks. All 29 cases were infected with H3N2v viruses that contain the matrix (M) gene from the influenza A (H1N1)pdm09 virus. This M gene may confer increased transmissibility to and among humans, compared to other variant influenza viruses. All cases have been laboratory-confirmed at CDC. Each of the 16 cases identified since July 12, 2012, reported contact with swine prior to illness onset; in 15 cases, contact occurred while attending or exhibiting swine at an agricultural fair. While the viruses identified in these cases are genetically nearly identical, separate swine exposure events in each state were associated with human infections. There is no indication that the cases in different states are epidemiologically related.

Clinical characteristics of the 16 H3N2v recent cases have been generally consistent with signs and symptoms of seasonal influenza, and have included fever, cough, pharyngitis, myalgia, and headache. No hospitalizations or deaths have occurred among the 16 confirmed cases since July 2012. Public health and agriculture officials are investigating the extent of disease among humans and swine, and additional cases are likely to be identified as the investigation continues.

Novel influenza A virus infection has been a nationally notifiable condition in the United States since 2007. Since that time, human infection with animal-origin influenza viruses has been rare, with ≤6 cases reported each year, until 2011 when 14 cases were identified. While most of the cases are thought to have been infected as a result of close contact with swine, limited human-to-human transmission of this virus was identified in some cases in 2011. Therefore, enhanced influenza surveillance is indicated, especially in regions and states with confirmed H3N2v cases.

Interim Recommendations for Health Care Providers

- Clinicians who suspect influenza in persons with recent exposure to swine should obtain a nasopharyngeal swab or aspirate from the patient, place the swab or aspirate in viral transport medium, and contact the local health department (see below) to arrange transport and request a timely diagnosis at the Washington State Public Health Laboratory
- Consider ordering Reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) testing for influenza for patients with influenza-like illness prior to the start of the traditional influenza season in October.
- Consider RT-PCR testing for influenza throughout the year for patients with influenza-like illness reporting recent swine exposure and for those who can be epidemiologically linked to confirmed cases of variant influenza.
- Commercially available rapid influenza diagnostic tests (RIDTs) may not detect H3N2v virus in respiratory specimens. Therefore, a negative rapid influenza diagnostic test result does not exclude infection with H3N2v or any influenza virus. In addition, a positive test result for influenza A cannot confirm H3N2v virus infection because these tests cannot distinguish between influenza A virus subtypes (they do not differentiate between human influenza A viruses and H3N2v virus). Therefore, respiratory specimens should be collected and sent for RT-PCR testing at the Washington State Public Health Laboratory.
- Clinicians should consider antiviral treatment with oral oseltamivir or inhaled zanamivir in patients with suspected or confirmed H3N2v virus infection. Antiviral treatment is most effective when started as soon as possible after influenza illness onset.

For more information:

- "Interim Guidance on Case Definitions to be Used for Investigations of Influenza A (H3N2) Variant Virus Cases" for state and local health departments is available at http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/case-definitions.htm.
- "Prevention Strategies for Seasonal and Influenza A(H3N2)v in Health Care Settings" is available at http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/prevention-strategies.htm.
- "Interim Guidance on Specimen Collection, Processing and Testing for Patients with Suspected Influenza A (H3N2) Variant Virus Infection" for public health professionals is available at http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/h3n2v-testing.htm, and
- "Interim Guidance for Influenza Surveillance: Additional Specimen Collection for Detection of Influenza A (H3N2) Variant Infections" for state and local health departments is available at http://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/h3n2v-surveillance.htm.
- Compendium of Measures to Prevent Disease Associated with Animals in Public Settings, 2011 is available at http://nasphv.org/documentsCompendiumAnimals.html

***** Influenza viruses that circulate in swine are called swine influenza viruses when isolated from swine, but are called variant viruses when isolated from humans.

If you have any questions, please contact your local public health department:

- Clark County Public Health: (360) 397-8182
- Cowlitz County Health and Human Services: (360) 414-5599
- Skamania County Community Health: (509) 427-3850
- Wahkiakum County Health and Human Services (360) 795-6207

Thank you for your partnership.