

# Important Health Notice

**TEST: In addition to providing an update, this Important Health Notice is being sent to all IHN recipients to test the improved alert notification system.**

## Information for Health Care Professionals Update on Influenza and Respiratory Infection Surveillance in Ontario

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Dear Colleagues,

During the week ending November 16, localized influenza activity was reported in one health region of Alberta. Sporadic activity was reported in parts of British Columbia and Ontario, while the rest of the country reported no activity. During the same week, the Public Health Agency of Canada received 1,386 reports of laboratory tests for influenza, with three influenza A (Ontario and British Columbia) and four influenza B (Alberta) detections.

The Influenza-like Illness (ILI) rate was 12 per 1,000 patient visits to November 16, which is below the expected range for this week.

### **Current Influenza Activity in Ontario**

In Ontario, there are reports of respiratory outbreaks in institutions; however no influenza-related outbreaks have occurred. The number of laboratory-confirmed sporadic influenza cases in Ontario is under 10, suggesting a late start to the influenza season. Strain characterization of Ontario isolates show that this year's vaccine is a good match and will protect us well from influenza infection.

Ontario conducts a year-round surveillance program. The Public Health Division (PHD) of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) uses a variety of sources to track influenza and respiratory infection activity in Ontario. Provincial data are analyzed and published weekly in the *Ontario Influenza Bulletin*, from October 31, 2005 until April 30, 2006 and alternate weeks thereafter.

### **Highlights:**

- **Current Influenza Activity in Canada**
- **Current Influenza Activity in Ontario**
- **Avian Influenza**
- **Advice for Ontarians Traveling Outside of Canada**

Ontario's surveillance program for the 2005/2006 respiratory infection season includes:

- **Laboratory surveillance** - 17 Ontario laboratories participate in the national influenza surveillance and they report on positive isolates of influenza and other respiratory viruses.
- **Sporadically-occurring cases of influenza** - The true number of sporadically occurring cases of influenza is not completely depicted since many individuals who experience influenza-like symptoms do not seek medical attention. Laboratory confirmed cases are reported by local health units to the PHD of the MOHLTC through the integrated Public Health Information System (iPHIS).

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- **Reports of Influenza and Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Institutions** - Under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (HPPA), nursing homes, homes for the aged, facilities operating under the *Developmental Services Act*, acute care and chronic care hospitals operating under the *Public Hospitals Act* must report respiratory infection outbreaks. Retirement homes are not required to report under the HPPA.
- **Influenza activity level reporting by health units across Ontario** - Influenza activity is assessed and reported to the PHD each health unit. Influenza activity is the level of influenza-like illness prevalent in the community and is categorized as: no activity, sporadic activity, localized outbreaks and widespread outbreaks.
- **Health Canada/College of Family Physicians of Canada FluWatch Program** - Sentinel physicians, recruited by the College of Family Physicians of Canada, report cases of influenza-like illness (ILI) to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

#### **Avian Influenza**

Avian Influenza continues to be a problem in some countries, mainly in Asia. Following the detection of outbreaks in Russia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia, the disease was reported in Romania, Turkey and Croatia in October 2005, confirming the westward spread of the virus along the pathways of migratory birds.

At this time, there is no efficient human to human transmission of avian influenza. The World Health Organization does not recommend any restrictions on travel to areas affected by H5N1 avian influenza nor screening of travelers coming from these areas.

#### **Advice for Ontarians Traveling Outside of Canada**

Travelers to affected areas should avoid contact with live poultry in marketplaces and farms.

Travelers to areas affected by avian influenza are not considered to be at elevated risk of infection unless direct and un-protected exposure to infected birds (including feathers, feces and under-cooked meat and egg products) occurs.

Direct contact with infected poultry, or surfaces and objects contaminated by their droppings, is considered the main route of human infection. Exposure risk is considered highest during slaughter, de-feathering, butchering, and preparation of poultry for cooking. There is no evidence that properly cooked poultry or poultry products can be a source of infection.

#### **For further information**

##### ***Ontario Influenza Bulletin:***

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/pubhealth/flu/flu\\_04/flubul\\_mn.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/pubhealth/flu/flu_04/flubul_mn.html)

##### **Public Health Agency of Canada information: FluWatch is available at:**

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fluwatch>

##### **Foreign Affairs Canada: Travel Advisory Information:**

[http://www.voyage.gc.ca/main/sos/ci/curen.asp?txt\\_ID=637](http://www.voyage.gc.ca/main/sos/ci/curen.asp?txt_ID=637)

##### **MOHLTC Healthcare Providers Hotline:**

1-866-212-2272

Sincerely,

*(original signed by)*

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