

Imperial County Public Health Department

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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

Influenza A H3N2 Drifted Cases Detected in Imperial County

All Three Cases Were Elderly and Hospitalized

December 15, 2014

Influenza is unpredictable with different flu viruses spreading and causing illness every season. So far this season, influenza A (H3N2) viruses have been found circulating most frequently and have been detected in almost all states.

In Imperial County, the first three flu cases have been identified as influenza A (H3N2), and all three have been confirmed as being different from the virus included in this season's flu vaccine. All of the cases were elderly (over age 65) individuals with other health issues, and all three were hospitalized.

The Public Health Department conducts year-round surveillance for influenza-like illness at three outpatient clinics and for severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) at both local hospitals. The first cases were identified through the SARI surveillance system.

Imperial County has seen a surge in influenza-like illness in recent weeks at both outpatient clinics and both hospitals. Nearly all of the cases have been influenza A. In December, an outbreak was reported at a local elementary school where the majority of one classroom and at least a dozen other students became ill with flu-like symptoms. Four of the students were confirmed to have influenza A.

In past seasons, more severe illness occurs when H3N2 viruses predominate. To date, about half of the influenza A (H3N2) cases analyzed nationwide since October are different from the H3N2 virus that is included in this year's flu vaccine. They are different enough that we are concerned that protection from vaccination against these drifted H3N2 viruses may be reduced.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) continues to recommend:

- Flu vaccination as the best way to protect against the flu. Vaccination may provide partial protection against the drifted viruses and should better protect against other non-drifted flu viruses that may circulate this season, including influenza B viruses.

- Antiviral medications as an important second line of defense against the flu. Treatment with antiviral drugs is especially important for people at high risk of serious flu complications or people who are very sick with flu. It's especially important to get antiviral medicines quickly – as they work best when started within two days of the beginning of flu symptoms.
- Everyday actions like covering your cough, staying away from sick people, and washing your hands often. If you get the flu, stay home from work or school. If you are sick, do not go near other people so that you don't make them sick too.

For more information, check out the Respiratory Illness Update posted on the Imperial County Public Health Department website at icphd.org

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