

INFLUENZA SEASON DEFINITION

The traditional influenza surveillance season is 32 weeks in length, beginning in October and ending mid-May of the following year. Starting in August, 2008, in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations, LAC DPH will begin year-round surveillance for influenza activity. Data will be collected and analyzed on a weekly basis. The weeks are numbered according to the calendar year, with week 1 corresponding to the first week in January.

DESCRIPTION OF INFLUENZA SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

I. SENTINEL CASE SURVEILLANCE

1. Influenza and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Tests

For the 2008-2009 season, a total of 9 sentinel laboratories serving Los Angeles County healthcare providers and institutions will report influenza testing activity on a weekly basis. Four of these facilities will report RSV data on a weekly basis. Laboratories report number of positive RSV tests, number of positive influenza A & B tests and total number of influenza tests completed. Selected samples from positive cases are sent to the Los Angeles County Public Health laboratory (PHL) for further testing and analysis.

2. Severe Pediatric Influenza

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health participates in the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) surveillance for severe pediatric influenza cases. The case definition is as follows: age 0-17 years; a clinical syndrome consistent with influenza or complications of influenza; confirmation by laboratory testing; and hospitalization in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) or death (with no period of complete recovery between the illness and death). After a case has been reported samples are sent for specialized testing at the PHL.

II. SYNDROMIC SURVEILLANCE

1. Emergency Department Visits for Influenza-Like Illness

Public Health's Syndromic Surveillance Project monitors initial self-reported symptoms from patients presenting to participating emergency departments throughout LAC. These symptoms are categorized into different clinical syndromes according to specific code words. The syndrome of influenza-like illness includes symptoms such as: fever, congestion, sneezing, sore throat, runny nose, and cough. The proportion of Influenza-like-illness (ILI) emergency department visits for all ages and by age group is analyzed weekly.

2. Influenza-Like Illness in Los Angeles County Schools

Participating schools will report to Public Health the percentage of students who visit the school nurse with influenza-like illness on a weekly basis. Influenza-like illness is defined as fever, cough and/or sore throat.

III. OTHER SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

1. National Retail Data Monitor (NRDM)

Public Health's Syndromic Surveillance Project receives selected types of over-the-counter medication and thermometer sales daily through the National Retail Data Monitor surveillance system. The number of thermometer sales is analyzed on a weekly basis as part of our influenza surveillance system.

2. Pneumonia and Influenza (P & I) Deaths

Each week, the vital statistics office reports the total number of death certificates received and the number of those for which pneumonia or influenza was listed as the underlying or contributing cause of death by age group. The percentage of all deaths due to P & I is calculated and compared to the previous season's data.

3. Influenza Vaccinations

Publicly funded influenza vaccine from the California Department of Public Health and vaccine purchased by Public Health are distributed by the Immunization Program to public clinics, community and free clinics, and private providers who agree to hold public clinics. Accountability forms for every dose administered are tracked. Publicly funded vaccine accounts for less than 10% of influenza vaccine distributed in LAC.

MORE INFORMATION

Selected results from the influenza surveillance systems are regularly published during the influenza season and may be accessed at: http://lapublichealth.org/acd/Flu_Sea_Surveillance.htm.

For more information about influenza in Los Angeles County, please visit:
<http://www.ph.lacounty.gov/acd/Flu.htm>