

Microbe Monthly

Communicable Disease Report

October 2009

El Paso County Department
of Health & Environment

2009 Influenza A H1N1 UPDATE

Since late August, surveillance data on influenza activity has shown large and sustained increases in influenza-related hospitalizations, outpatient visits for influenza like illness (ILI) and proportion of positive influenza tests. In El Paso County, we are seeing similar increases in hospitalizations, school-based absenteeism (see graph below), and outpatient ILI visits. We are also receiving anecdotal reports of significant increases in visits in hospital ERs and physician offices. Viral typing data still shows 2009 H1N1 influenza as the predominant virus circulating at this time. From a national perspective, current levels of influenza activity are exceeding what is average for a typical flu season.

There are several take-home points we'd like you to relay to patients as the pandemic continues:

- 1) **STAY HOME WHEN YOU ARE SICK.** There is a significant surge occurring in hospital ERs and physician offices for ILI. Patients should be reminded that most people with 2009 H1N1 influenza can manage their illness at home and do not need antiviral medications. An ill person who is cared for at home should stay away from other people in the home, rest and drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Visits to clinicians should only occur if symptoms are significantly worsening or there is an exacerbation of underlying conditions that cannot be safely managed at home.
- 2) **PEOPLE WITH FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS DO NOT NEED TO BE TESTED.** The Health Department has received anecdotal reports of patients coming in for a clinic visit just to get a flu test. Flu testing (whether using a rapid test or an H1N1 specific test) is not recommended for most persons. Limited testing of inpatients may help with clinical management. In the outpatient setting, clinical decisions can be made based on the constellation of symptoms alone without the need for 'confirmatory testing.' Also keep in mind that recent data from the CDC showed the sensitivity of rapid flu tests in diagnosing 2009 H1N1 influenza has been low (47%). Therefore, clinicians and patients may be 'falsely' reassured that an ILI is not due to influenza.
- 3) **PEOPLE WITH UNDERLYING HEALTH CONDITIONS SHOULD PLAN AHEAD WITH THEIR CLINICIAN.** Some people are more likely to have serious complications from influenza infection and should talk to their clinician about whether they need to be evaluated if they develop ILI. This includes persons who are 65 and older, pregnant women, and people who have underlying medical conditions such as cancer, chronic lung disease, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disorders, liver disorders, neurological disorders and other immunocompromised conditions. Patients with concerns should call ahead to describe their symptoms. This will allow you to advise them on the best care and prevent the spread of illness in your office.
- 4) **RECOMMENDED PERIOD OF ISOLATION FOR 2009 H1N1 FLU IS 24 HOURS AFTER FEVER HAS RESOLVED.** Anyone sick with ILI should stay home from work, school, childcare, church, and group activities until at least 24 hours after fever has resolved without the use of fever-reducing medications. Advise them to talk with employers and schools about their illness and exclusion policies. The Health Department is asking schools and businesses be flexible with students and employees to allow them to stay home while ill or caring for ill family members.

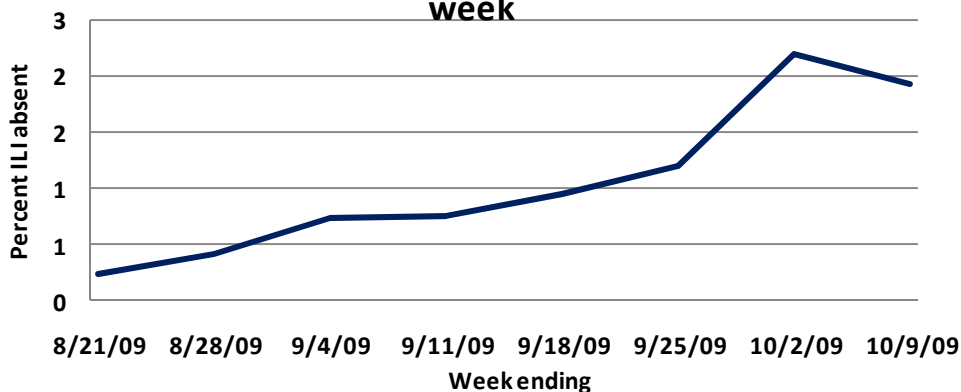
More Information:

For general questions about H1N1 and seasonal flu call the Colorado Help Line, toll free:
1-877-462-2911

For more information about H1N1, resources for parents, schools, and businesses visit the Health Department Web site: www.elpasocountyhealth.org

If you need medical care but do not have a doctor, call the Pikes Peak United Way: 211

Percent ILI absent in a local school district by week



Contact Information

CD/TB Program

Weekday Hours (M-Th)* 719-578-3220
After-Hours Emergency 719-385-9622

Immunizations

719-578-3272

Environmental Health

719-575-8636

*Note: Health Department regular hours are Monday—Thursday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Weekday Hours (M-F) 303-692-2700
After-Hours 303-370-9395