Health News: Preparing for the influenza season – trends, surveillance, reporting, and prevention

Trends
- While influenza viruses are detected year-round, in the U.S. they typically circulate during the fall and winter months.
- The timing and duration of influenza season varies year to year, but influenza activity typically begins to increase in October, then peaks between December and February, and continues through May.
- In the previous five influenza seasons, 2018-2023, in El Paso County, peak influenza activity has occurred as early as December (2022-23 influenza season) and as late as May (2021-22 influenza season).

Surveillance
- Influenza is monitored year-round, but more in-depth surveillance activities are implemented from October through May, and specifically from the 40th week of the year through the 20th week of the following year, which this influenza season will be October 2, 2023 through May 18, 2024.
- County-level hospitalization data, an important metric for measuring the timing and severity of influenza season, will be reported on a weekly basis beginning in October on EPCPH’s Influenza Data Dashboard.
- Statewide surveillance metrics, including influenza-associated hospitalizations, influenza-associated pediatric deaths, test positivity from sentinel hospital labs, and outbreaks in long-term care and correctional facilities, will be reported on the Colorado Department of Public Health’s (CDPHE) Viral Respiratory Disease Data Dashboard.

Reporting
- The following influenza-associated conditions and outbreaks are reportable to public health:
  - Influenza-associated hospitalizations: Patients who have a hospital admission date 14 days or fewer after a positive influenza test or a hospital admission date three days or fewer before a positive influenza test.
  - Influenza-associated pediatric deaths: Report any suspected or confirmed influenza-associated pediatric death in children under 18 years.
  - Influenza Outbreaks: In long-term care facilities, health care facilities, correctional facilities, schools, and child care facilities. To report an influenza outbreak, please contact EPCPH’s Communicable Disease Team at (719) 578-3220.

Prevention
- Vaccination is the most effective way to protect against influenza infection and associated complications.
  - In the Southern Hemisphere, influenza season precedes that in the Northern Hemisphere and occurs between March and September. The 2023 Southern Hemisphere seasonal influenza vaccine reduced the risk for influenza-associated hospitalization by 52%. The influenza viruses circulating in the Southern Hemisphere this year, are genetically similar to those targeted by the 2023-24 Northern Hemisphere influenza vaccine formula. This indicates that this season’s vaccine might offer similar protection if the viruses that were circulating during the Southern Hemisphere’s influenza season also predominate during the upcoming Northern Hemisphere’s influenza season.
  - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends routine annual influenza vaccination for all persons aged ≥6 months who do not have contraindications. For individuals needing only one dose of influenza vaccine for the season, vaccination should ideally be offered during September or October.
  - Key prevention actions also include staying home when you are sick, covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, washing your hands often, avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose, and frequently cleaning and disinfecting commonly touched surfaces at home, work, or school especially when someone in ill.

Questions? Please Contact:
El Paso County Public Health CD/TB Program
Hours: M-F, 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
(719) 578-3220; after-hours emergency: (719) 235-2278
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
(303) 692-2700; after-hours emergency: (303) 370-9395
www.elpasocountyhealth.org
Reportable Diseases and Conditions List