

REPORT ON INFLUENZA

Both locally and nationally, influenza activity is showing continued moderate increases, but remains low overall. In Los Angeles County, the reported percent positive influenza test from our sentinel sites has increased with roughly 17% of tests positive for influenza during week 5, yet this level is lower than this time last year when 24% of tests were positive (Table 1).

Similarly, while this time last year 36 influenza-associated deaths were identified, this year only 7 deaths have been identified to date. In addition, this season a much greater proportion of type B influenza has been circulating as compared to last season; currently, 40% of all positive influenza tests from our sentinel sites have been type B, while only 7% were type B last year. These local findings are similar to national reports for influenza activity; only moderate increases are occurring across most states, with low overall levels of activity.

Viral subtyping conducted by the CDC continues to identify relatively high levels of type B influenza with 27% of national influenza samples testing positive for B during week 5. Among type A isolates that have been subtyped during week 5, 86% were the pandemic H1N1 2009 strain. This year's vaccine continues to closely match the current circulating viral strains and should provide good protection against disease. Because influenza can circulate into spring, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continue to urge vaccination for those who have not been vaccinated yet against influenza.

1. What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza, also called flu, is an illness caused by a virus (germ). Many people in the United States (U.S.) get the flu each year. The flu is very common, but can cause serious illness for certain people. Every year, between 5-10% of the U.S. population get the flu, and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from complications of this disease.

2. How does the flu spread?

Flu usually spreads from person-to-person through droplets from a sick person's cough or sneeze. It also can spread by touching a surface or an object that has flu virus on it, like a doorknob or computer keyboard, and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Flu viruses are found worldwide. The flu occurs mostly in the fall and winter months in the United States, but can also spread into spring.

3. What are the symptoms of the flu?

There are many illnesses that feel like the flu. The symptoms of the flu usually come on suddenly and strong, and can include headache, fever, chills, cough, sore throat, and muscle or body aches. Some people may have vomiting and

diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults. People can have the flu and spread it to others 1-2 days before showing signs of illness.

4. Who is at greater risk for severe illness from the flu?

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people). Serious problems related to the flu can happen at any age. Some people are at high risk for developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick:

- Adults 65 years and older
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease)
- People with weakened immunity (such as cancer, HIV or AIDS)
- Children

5. How is the flu treated?

Prescription medicines called antiviral drugs can treat the flu. If you are sick, these drugs can make you feel better faster and make the flu feel milder. Most people who get the flu will get better without these medicines. If you need help getting well, your doctor may decide to give you antiviral drugs. People who are more at risk for severe illness should see their doctor right away if they think they have the flu.

6. If I have the flu, should I take antibiotics?

Antibiotics do not work to treat the flu because the flu is caused by a virus. Doctors use antibiotics for treating infections caused by bacteria.

For information on flu shots locally, call:

[Whittier Public Health Center](#)

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http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/chs/Docs/SPA7_Whittier_122613.pdf