



Chicago Flu Update



City of Chicago

Rahm Emanuel, Mayor

March 2, 2012

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Chicago Department of Public Health

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What is the risk?

Currently, the risk of influenza infection in the Chicago area has increased. The percentage of specimens testing positive for influenza is at its highest level seen all season and three additional influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations were reported for week 8; including one death in an older adult male. However, compared to the same time period last season, the number of positive influenza specimens and the number of influenza-associated hospitalizations reported to CDPH remains substantially lower, with a greater than 80% decrease in both. Vaccination is the best way to protect against human seasonal influenza infection and all Chicagoans aged six months and older are encouraged to get vaccinated. Chicagoans should ask their healthcare provider or pharmacist about vaccine availability. Uninsured individuals and those with insurance that does not cover flu shots can [obtain a voucher for a free flu shot at Walgreens](#)¹. The Chicago Department of Public Health has influenza vaccine available at [CDPH immunization clinics](#)².

Are severe cases of influenza occurring?

Three influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations were reported for week 8 (February 19-25, 2012), including one death in a 91 year old male with influenza B. Since October 2011, nine influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations have been reported. Suspected novel influenza, pediatric influenza-associated deaths, and influenza-associated ICU hospitalizations should all be reported to CDPH via [INEDSS](#)³. Outbreaks of influenza-like illness in a congregate setting are also reportable; in Chicago these reports can be made by phone to (312) 746-5911.

How much influenza-like illness is occurring?

For the week of February 19-25, 2012, with 14 hospitals reporting, 6.1% of emergency room visits were due to ILI (i.e., fever of 100°F or greater, with cough or sore throat). This is among the highest levels seen all season and is a little over one percentage point lower than levels seen during the same surveillance week in 2011. From February 19-25, 2012, with 15 outpatient clinics reporting, 4.2% of outpatient clinic visits were due to ILI. This is the sixth consecutive week that an increase has been noted and is the second consecutive week where levels have been higher than levels reported during the same surveillance weeks in 2011 (Figure 1).

Which influenza strains are circulating?

Data on influenza virus test results are reported by Chicago laboratories performing influenza subtyping. For the week of February 19-25, 2012, with 6 laboratories reporting, 26 of 314 (8.3%) specimens tested for influenza were positive. Although the highest percentage seen so far this season, this is still nearly two times lower than levels seen during the same surveillance week in 2011 (Figure 2). Among the positive specimens, 17 typed as influenza A (8 H1N1, 6 H3N2, 3 untyped), and 9 typed as influenza B. Since October 2011, 67 out of 3,710 (1.8%) specimens tested for influenza have been positive, with 47 typed as influenza A (20 H1N1, 19 H3N2, and 8 not subtyped) and 20 typed as influenza B.

Where can I get more information?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [FluView](#)⁴ report provides national updates and trends related to the intensity of influenza activity across the United States, as well as detailed information on antiviral resistance, severity of illness, and other topics. Updates specific to [Illinois](#)⁵ and [Suburban Cook County](#)⁶ are also available online.

Figure 1. Weekly reported percent of outpatient clinic visits attributed to influenza-like illness, Chicago, by week, for current season (2011-2012) and previous season (Chicago and Illinois), October-May.

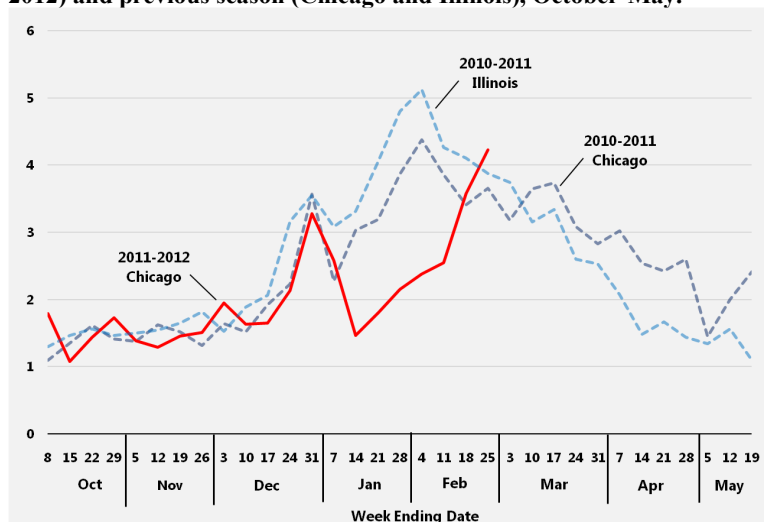
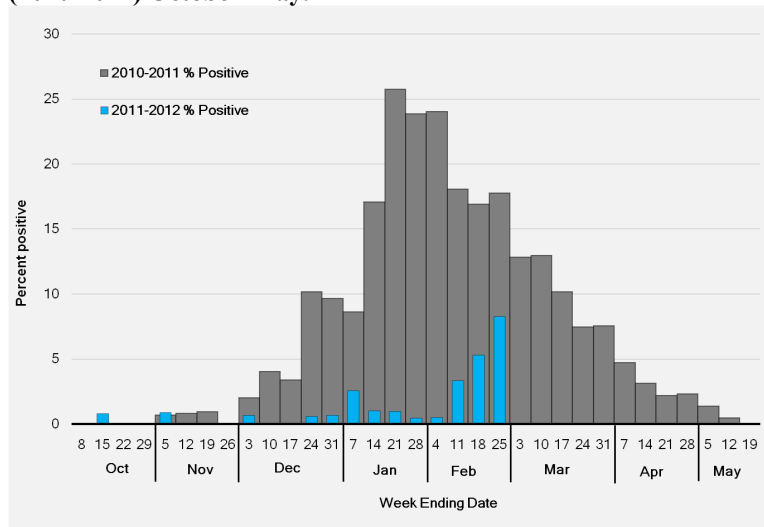


Figure 2. Percentage of specimens testing positive (by RT-PCR) for influenza as reported by local laboratories serving Chicago hospitals, for the current season (2011-2012) and previous season (2010-2011) October-May.



¹<https://www.chicagohan.org/ViewsFlash/servlet/viewsflash?cmd=showform&pollid=Vouchers!Indiv>; ²http://www.cityofchicago.org/content/city/en/depts/cdph/supp_info/infectious/immunizations_walk-inclinics.html; ³<https://dph.partner.illinois.gov/>; ⁴<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm>; ⁵<http://www.idph.state.il.us/flu/surveillance.htm>; ⁶<http://www.cookcountypublichealth.org/data-reports#influenza>