

Important Health Notice

Information for Healthcare Professionals

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Update on Influenza

Highlights:

- **New strain of H3N2 virus (A California/7/04) identified in Ontario**
- **Human Cases of Avian Influenza – new symptoms: gastrointestinal and neurological**

Dear Colleagues:

The Public Health Agency of Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory (NML) received a report from the U.S. Centres for Disease Control last week that some of the Canadian influenza virus isolates¹ were identified as a new strain of H3N2 virus, the **A California/7/04**. Since last week the NML has received the necessary reagents from CDC and tested some recent specimens, confirming the circulation of this new strain in specimens submitted from several regions in Ontario.

Influenza viruses change and evolve on an ongoing basis and it is not unexpected that new strains appear during an influenza season.

A/California is a new variant influenza strain which is related to the already circulating A/Fujian H3N2 virus. The A/California strain is related to the A/Fujian strain, a component of which has been incorporated into this year's influenza vaccine. Therefore, the **current vaccine is still expected to provide some level of protection against this new variant.**

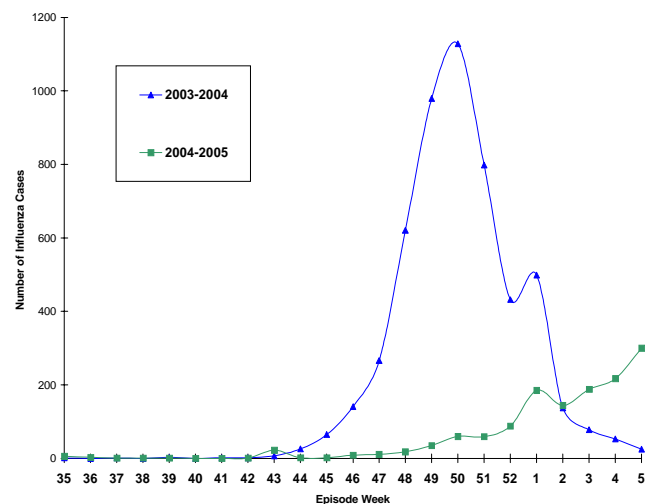
The Public Health Agency of Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will continue to monitor all influenza strains circulating in Canada, including the new A/California strain. Medical Officers of Health in your area will continue to assist you with influenza outbreak control issues, as well as providing advice on the appropriate use of antiviral medications.

The flu vaccine is the most effective protection from the influenza virus and its complications.

Influenza activity is currently widespread in Ontario. As shown in the chart below, influenza activity started later then the previous season. The overall activity compared to last year is lower but is still increasing at this time.

Ontario Reportable Disease: Influenza Activity Surveillance

(Source: Reportable Diseases Information System)



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¹ routinely sent to them for strain characterization

New Symptoms in Human Cases of Avian Influenza

In southern Vietnam, a four-year-old boy presented with severe diarrhea, followed by seizures, coma, and death.

The diagnosis of avian influenza A (H5N1) was established in February 2005 by isolation of the virus from cerebrospinal fluid, fecal, throat, and serum specimens. The patient's nine-year-old sister had died from a similar syndrome two weeks earlier.

These cases have important clinical, scientific, and public health implications. Healthcare providers should be aware of these new presenting symptoms.

The third wave of Avian Influenza A (H5N1) commenced in December 2004 and continues to date. The countries involved in this third wave are Vietnam, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Cambodia. To date the number of people infected in this third wave is 11, of whom 10 have died.

Since human cases of H5N1 were first reported in January 2004, no cases have been reported in health care workers or in professionals undertaking culling activities.

Additional information is available at:

Ministry of Health and Long-term Care:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/emu/emu_mn.html

MOHLTC 24/7 Healthcare Provider Hotline: 1-866-212-2272

Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca

World Health Organization: www.who.int/csr/don/en/T

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