



Health, Housing & Community Services Department
Public Health Division
(510) 981-5300

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Health Officer

Health Alert April 15, 2013

Novel influenza H7N9

Please distribute to all providers in your practice

Current Situation

On April 1, 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported three human infections with a novel influenza A (H7N9) virus in China. These are the first known human infections with this avian influenza strain. The virus has also been detected in birds from poultry markets in China. As of April 12, 2013, a total of 43 human cases had been reported, including 11 deaths. Most cases had severe respiratory illness. The median age of cases is 65 years, with a range of 4-87 years. New cases continue to be reported and case counts are likely to increase.

At this time, no human cases of novel influenza A (H7N9) have been detected outside of China. While investigations are ongoing, no person-to-person transmission or epidemiologic link between any of the cases has been identified thus far. Preliminary data suggest that the virus is susceptible to neuraminidase inhibitors. At this time, no vaccine for novel influenza A (H7N9) is available.

With the large volume of international travel between California and China, suspect cases of novel influenza A (H7N9) are likely to occur in California.

Actions to be taken

1. REPORT and CONSIDER TESTING for suspected novel influenza A (H7N9) in patients who meet the exposure criteria described below. Call Berkeley Public Health at (510) 981-5300 Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 5:00pm and at 510-981-5911 after hours for consultation and approval before sending specimens to the State Public Health Laboratory.
2. IMPLEMENT standard, droplet, contact and airborne precautions, including eye protection, for healthcare personnel caring for patients under investigation for novel influenza A (H7N9) until more is known about the transmission characteristics of this virus.
3. Consider empiric TREATMENT with influenza antiviral medications (oral oseltamivir or inhaled zanamivir) as soon as possible, without waiting for laboratory confirmation.
4. CONSULT an infectious disease specialist and/or the CDC webpage for clinical information: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h7n9-virus.htm>

Additional Information

Testing Criteria:

Novel influenza A (H7N9) testing by public health reference laboratories will be considered for persons with illness compatible with influenza who also meet either of the following exposure criteria:

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- Recent (within 10 days) travel to countries where human cases of novel influenza A (H7N9) virus infection have been detected, especially if there was recent direct or close contact with animals (such as wild birds, poultry, or pigs) or where influenza A (H7N9) viruses are known to be circulating in animals. Currently, China is the only country that has recently reported novel influenza A (H7N9) human cases; OR
- Recent (within 10 days) contact with confirmed human cases of infection with novel influenza A (H7N9) virus.

Specimen collection and routing:

- After consultation with Berkeley Public Health, specimens for potential novel influenza A (H7N9) virus should be submitted to the California Department of Public Health Viral and Rickettsial Diseases Laboratory (CDPH-VRDL) in Richmond.
- Clinicians should obtain a nasopharyngeal swab or aspirate from these patients, using Standard, Droplet, Contact and Airborne Precautions, including eye protection. Place the swab or aspirate in viral transport medium, and contact Berkeley Public Health at the above numbers to arrange transport to CDPH-VRDL.
- CDPH-VRDL will screen specimens and forward suspect influenza A (H7N9) specimens to the CDC for confirmatory testing.
- Viral culture should not be attempted in these cases.

Sources for More Information

- CDC Avian Influenza A (H7N9) information page: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h7n9-virus.htm>
- CDC Health Advisory, Human Infections with Novel Influenza A (H7N9) Virus: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/HAN/han00344.asp>
- WHO Situation Updates: <http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>
- CDC interim guidance for infection control: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h7n9-infection-control.htm>

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