



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
*PO Box 47890, Olympia WA 98504-7890*

November 6, 2009

Dear Colleagues:

In Washington, the number of 2009 H1N1 influenza infections has sharply increased over the past several weeks. We are now experiencing levels of influenza activity usually seen in January or February. No one can predict what flu activity will look like over the remaining fall and coming winter months.

When managing patients with suspected or confirmed influenza in the coming months, we encourage you to:

- 1) **Give antiviral treatment as soon as possible to:**
  - a. **Hospitalized patients,**
  - b. **Pregnant women and women up to two weeks post-partum (including following pregnancy loss),**
  - c. **Persons at high risk for influenza-related complications, and**
  - d. **Persons with clinical deterioration or lower respiratory tract infection.**

In these clinical settings, healthcare providers should not wait for laboratory results before starting empiric therapy.

Additional information regarding treatment recommendations is available at:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/recommendations.htm>

- 2) **Do additional influenza testing in hospitalized patients who test negative for influenza by rapid tests when influenza is still suspected.**

In some settings, the sensitivity of rapid influenza antigen tests is low; that is, the test is negative when the person truly has an influenza infection.

Tests with better sensitivity for influenza include direct fluorescent antibody tests, virus culture (routine and shell vial cultures) and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) assays. For non-ICU patients, additional testing should be performed at commercial laboratories. For ICU and deceased patients, additional testing can be performed at commercial laboratories or the Washington State Public Health Laboratories.

Diagnosing influenza in critically ill patients who have been ill for several days can be difficult. In these situations, sending bronchoalveolar lavage or deep tracheal suction specimens for virus culture may provide a diagnosis.

Additional information regarding testing and treatment recommendations are available from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/>) and the Washington State Department of Health (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehsphi/Epidemiology/CD/swineflu/sfluresources.htm>).

Sincerely,



Maxine Hayes, MD, MPH  
State Health Officer