

What the Atlantic County Division of Public Health is Doing Regarding Disease Prevention/Preparedness

Communicable Disease Surveillance in Atlantic County

The Atlantic County Division of Public Health participates in ongoing influenza surveillance activities. Several of these activities are described below.

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) Year-round Influenza-like Illness (ILI) Surveillance

Atlantic County participates in the NJDHSS Year-round ILI Surveillance involving schools, sentinel physicians, nursing homes, and hospital emergency departments. Data is reported to the county epidemiologist and is transmitted to the NJDHSS each week. The information is tabulated and graphic and narrative reports are generated and distributed to our community partners.

- **Schools** - Sentinel schools are recruited based on geographic distribution throughout the county. Schools provide weekly data regarding the rate of absenteeism, as well as the predominant reason for absenteeism (respiratory illness, gastrointestinal illness, etc.). Additional sentinel school districts may be asked to report on behalf of individual schools.
- **Physicians** - Sentinel primary care providers are recruited to report cases of ILI. Additionally, these physicians may be requested to collect specimens from some of their patients for laboratory analysis. In the event of a novel or pandemic virus, Atlantic County's sentinel physicians will be a valuable source for community level information on the epidemiology of the disease and required specimens.
- **Nursing Homes** - Nursing homes participate in ILI surveillance voluntarily. Nursing homes provide the number of residents ill with respiratory or ILI on a weekly basis.
- **Hospital Emergency Departments** - All Atlantic County hospital emergency departments report the flu-like activity that they are seeing on a weekly basis. In addition, NJDHSS has developed a dedicated e-mail address for physicians and hospitals to report specific pediatric influenza related critical cases/deaths.

NJDHSS Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System (CDRSS)

- CDRSS is a Web-based reporting tool that is used to enter, update and track New Jersey's reportable communicable disease information.

- Along with the ability to enter patient cases in a real-time environment, CDRSS users (e.g., local health departments, hospitals, health care providers, laboratories, health-related institutions) can also browse and search for cases by several parameters (e.g., name, disease, age, address, illness onset date), and receive data summary reports, including summary information on county level disease trends.
- A flu surveillance reporting module was added to CDRSS in 2008, providing end users with the ability to enter weekly ILI surveillance data online and generate customized reports down to the county level.

EpiCenter, hospital-based syndromic surveillance system [formerly known as Real-time Outbreak and Disease Surveillance (RODS)]

- EpiCenter is a secure web-based service designed to monitor hospital emergency department chief complaint data and analyze them for aberrations suggestive of a disease outbreak. Automated alert notifications are sent via email to designated health department staff on an hourly basis for further investigation.
- The county epidemiologist conducts twice daily reviews of the EpiCenter system to determine unusual patterns of hospital emergency department patient chief complaints. All EpiCenter chief complaint alerts are investigated promptly by the county epidemiologist or designee, in coordination with local hospital staff as per established protocols.

Emergency Department Volume Data

- Hospital emergency departments provide the number of emergency department visits and the number of admissions during the preceding 24 hour period. This surveillance system is useful for the detection of aberrations in emergency department volume that might indicate unusual disease activity. The NJDHSS receives daily submissions from all acute care hospitals statewide regarding emergency department visits/admissions.
- The county epidemiologist coordinates the daily collection and reporting of local hospitals emergency department admissions data to the NJDHSS.
- The emergency department data is analyzed by NJDHSS CDS staff for anomalies and if the recent volume is higher than expected, follow-up is made by county epidemiologist and hospital's Infection Control Professional (ICP).

Influenza Surveillance in the Animal Population

- In addition to human surveillance activities, the NJDHSS maintains ongoing communication with the NJ Department of Agriculture regarding influenza surveillance in the animal population (avian and swine).
- Additional zoonotic and veterinary based surveillance efforts are currently under development and will be deployed locally once available.

Education

Periodically the Health Planning, Information and Education Unit sends disease prevention (“Cover Your Cough”, “Stop Sharing [germs]”) posters and pamphlets in English and Spanish to schools, municipalities et al. partners as a reminder to wash hands often, cover coughs and sneezes, and to stay home when sick. (See also Section 8, “Web Resources”.)

Professional health educators are available by appointment to come to businesses to demonstrate and discuss these issues.