

## Influenza Testing Update Jan 2011

Influenza season is now upon us in all areas of the U.S. This year (2010-2011) appears to be a much more 'traditional season'. Influenza is a contagious respiratory virus, usually circulating in the northern hemisphere between December and April each year. The subtypes isolated vary from year to year. Most states have made influenza infection a reportable disease beginning this year. According to the CDC, they expect to see both 2009 H1N1 Influenza A, plus seasonal H3N2 Influenza A, circulating in the general population this season. Both of these strains, as well as Influenza B, are included in this year's vaccine. A change in vaccine recommendations occurred during the 2009-2010 season: it is now strongly recommended that everyone older than 6mo of age be vaccinated, in order to reduce the spread of this illness. During the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, it was found that even healthy young adults were susceptible to the disease, & vaccination is one way to reduce the severity of illness as well as the number of cases.

Influenza infection may be mild to severe. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- fever\* or feeling feverish/chills
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle or body aches
- headaches
- fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

*\*It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.*

Of course, people should always take steps to avoid infection:

- Avoid close contact w/ sick individuals
- Stay home when you are sick
- Cover your mouth & nose when coughing or sneezing, preferably by coughing 'into your elbow'; this avoids the contamination of hands.
- Clean your hands often: the best cleaner is soap & water; if this is not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, & mouth. This is how most influenza germs get in-a 'free ride' by us!
- Practice good health habits: get lots of sleep, avoid stress, eat healthy, drink plenty of water

At this time, treatment with antiviral medication is only recommended for high-risk patients, such as children <2yrs, patients >65 yrs, pregnant patients, patients with underlying chronic conditions such as asthma or diabetes. Treatment is NOT usually recommended for otherwise healthy outpatients with no other risk factors. Treatment of high-risk symptomatic patients should not wait for lab confirmation of influenza. Two FDA-approved influenza antiviral medications are recommended for use in the United States during the 2010-2011 influenza season: **oseltamivir** (Tamiflu®) and **zanamivir** (Relenza®). Oseltamivir and zanamivir are chemically related antiviral medications known as neuraminidase inhibitors that have activity against both influenza A and B viruses.

For more information on all aspects of influenza infection, detection, vaccination, & treatment, please see [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu).