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## Novel Influenza A H7N9 - What Should Healthcare Providers Do?

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 15, 2013 (18:00 CET), a total of 60 human cases had been reported. Most cases had severe respiratory illness, and 13 died. New cases continue to be reported and case counts are likely to increase (updates are available at the WHO website: <http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>). 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.

With the large volume of international travel between our neighboring state California and China and between California and Nevada, suspect cases of novel influenza A (H7N9) are likely to occur. The Washoe County Health District recommends implementing Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations on testing for suspect novel influenza A (H7N9) cases. Clinicians should consider the possibility of novel influenza A (H7N9) virus infection in persons who present with respiratory illness compatible with influenza within 10 days of the following exposures:

- ◆ Recent travel to countries where human cases of novel influenza A (H7N9) virus infection have been detected, especially if there was 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 contact with confirmed human cases of infection with novel influenza A (H7N9) virus.

**Lab-confirmed influenza and extraordinary illness are reportable in Nevada per NAC 441A. Clinicians should notify Washoe County Health District immediately of any suspect novel influenza cases at 775-328-3735 (phone) or 328-3764 (Fax).**

Specimens from patients with potential novel influenza A (H7N9) virus infection should be submitted to the Nevada State Public Health Laboratory (NSPHL) for testing, regardless of the on-site rapid influenza testing results. NSPHL can determine whether a specimen is unsubtypeable for known circulating influenza subtypes.

If 'unsubtypeable' it would be considered highly suspect for novel influenza A (H7N9). Additional confirmatory testing would be performed at the CDC. This testing algorithm is consistent with the algorithm used in 2009 during the influenza A (2009 H1) pandemic.

Healthcare personnel (HCP) caring for patients under investigation for novel influenza A (H7N9) should adhere to **Standard Precautions plus Droplet, Contact, and Airborne Precautions, including eye protection**, until more is known about the transmission characteristics of the virus. All clusters of respiratory illness in HCP caring for patients with severe acute respiratory illness should be investigated.

At this time, no vaccine for novel influenza A (H7N9) is available. Preliminary data suggest that the virus is susceptible to neuraminidase inhibitors. Antiviral treatment is most effective when started as soon as possible after illness onset. Clinicians should start empiric treatment with influenza antiviral medications (oral oseltamivir or inhaled zanamivir) as soon as possible, without waiting for laboratory confirmation, on the following individuals:

- ◆ Persons hospitalized with suspected influenza, including suspected novel influenza A (H7N9) infection
- ◆ Persons at high risk for developing flu-related complications, including children younger than 5, adults 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, and those with certain underlying medical conditions

Additional information on novel influenza A (H7N9) is available at the following websites:

- ◆ WHO Situation Updates: <http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>
- ◆ CDC Health Advisory (April 5, 2013): <http://emergency.cdc.gov/HAN/han00344.asp>
- ◆ CDC avian influenza A (H7N9) information page: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h7n9-virus.htm>
- ◆ CDC interim guidance for infection control: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h7n9-infection-control.htm>

*(This article is adapted from California Department of Public Health's letter to healthcare providers and modified to meet WCHD's needs.)*