

NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ALERT
New Mexico Department of Health (NMHealth) Marks the End of the 2023-2024 Influenza Season
May 2, 2024

Background:

The New Mexico Department of Health (NMHealth) is seeing low influenza activity statewide and considers the influenza season to be over. Sporadic influenza activity continues to occur and it is possible to see outbreaks of influenza and influenza-like illness (ILI) outside of the influenza season. COVID-19 activity remains unpredictable and we may see higher levels of community transmission before the fall. During periods of low influenza activity, an influenza outbreak is defined as one confirmed case of influenza by PCR test and any other cases of ILI in the same geographic location. ILI is defined as fever of greater than 100° F and cough and/or sore throat. Any rapid positive influenza results should be confirmed by PCR before declaring an outbreak during low influenza activity. Outbreaks should be reported to the on-call epidemiologist 24/7/365 at 1-833-796-8773 (1-833-SWNURSE).

NMHealth reminds providers and their staff that in accordance with New Mexico Administrative Code (NMAC) 7.4.3.13, influenza is a reportable condition for the following situations:

- Laboratory-confirmed hospitalizations for influenza
- Influenza-associated pediatric death
- Avian or novel influenza
- Acute illness or condition of any type involving large numbers of persons in the same geographic area (outbreaks)

The 2023-2024 respiratory disease season marked the second consecutive year where respiratory illness levels have peaked above levels seen during the ten years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. While activity has remained low since the start of the year, there was a near-concurrent spike in influenza, RSV, and COVID-19 around the holidays. Peak weekly hospitalization rates for influenza among all age groups were among the highest seen in the past 10 flu seasons. Moreover, RSV hospitalizations among children 0-4 also reached their second highest level in the past five years, with weekly rates peaking at over twice the rates seen since 2018-19. Additionally, there were over 47,000 visits for influenza-like illness at just one of the 44 syndromic surveillance sites across the state (43,000 at all 44 sites in 2022-2023). While there were relatively few influenza outbreaks in long term care facilities, there were outbreaks associated with COVID-19 in correctional facilities and many reports of respiratory illness in schools and daycares.

EPIDEMIOLOGY AND RESPONSE

As we move forward with low levels of activity, NMHealth reminds healthcare facilities that now is the best time to evaluate employee vaccination policies, visitation policies, and outbreak response procedures for the coming influenza season. Healthcare facilities are encouraged to monitor CDC guidance on infection control practices for both influenza and COVID-19 (links provided below). While the 2023-2024 flu season is over in New Mexico, you may still see sporadic cases throughout the summer. We encourage you to continue watching for outbreaks and novel influenza, and to report them promptly to 1-833-796-8773 (1-833-SWNURSE).

Recommendations for Clinicians:

- Respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette should be implemented beginning at the first point of contact with a potentially infected person to prevent the transmission of all respiratory tract infections in the facility. Encourage all persons within the facility to cover their cough or sneeze with a tissue. Throw all tissue in the trash after use. Maintain good hand hygiene by washing with soap and water, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after coughing or sneezing. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth without cleaning hands.
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm>
- Make the means for appropriate hand cleansing readily available within the facility, including intake areas, visitor entrances and exits, visitation rooms, common areas, and staff-restricted areas, in addition to lavatories and food preparation and dining areas. The means for hand cleansing are ideally running water, soap, and hand drying machines or paper towels and waste baskets; alternatively, except in lavatories and food preparation areas, alcohol-based hand sanitizers may be used
- Clean all common areas within the facility routinely and immediately, when visibly soiled, with the cleaning agents normally used in these areas. Eating utensils should be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap. Cups and utensils should not be shared until after washing.

Additional Resources:

- Clinical Signs and Symptoms of Influenza (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/symptoms.htm>)
- Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic
[Infection Control: Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 \(SARS-CoV-2\) | CDC](#)
- Influenza in long-term care facilities
<https://www.nmhca.org/video-trainings/>
- Prevention Strategies for Seasonal Influenza in Healthcare Settings
[Prevention Strategies for Seasonal Influenza in Healthcare Settings | CDC](#)

New Mexico Health Alert Network: To register for the NM Health Alert Network, please visit the following site <https://nm.readyop.com/fs/4cjZ/10b2> Please fill out the registration form

completely and click Submit at the bottom of the page, to begin receiving Important health alerts, advisories, and updates.

Please Note that our system also utilizes text messaging to notify members of important health information. Due to FCC Regulation changes that are designed to decrease the amount of unwanted spam text messages sent each year to citizens, please save, this phone number **(855) 596-1810** as the **“New Mexico Health Alert Network”** default phone number for your account used for text messages on the mobile device(s) you register with us.