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Preventing the Spread of Influenza: Guidance for Healthcare Providers in an Office Setting

Human influenza is transmitted from person to person primarily via virus-laden large droplets that are generated when infected persons cough or sneeze; these large droplets can then be directly deposited onto the mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tract of susceptible persons who are near (i.e., within 3 feet) the droplet source. Transmission also may occur through direct and indirect contact with infectious respiratory secretions (i.e., contaminated surfaces).

Individuals with influenza-like illnesses seek care primarily in outpatient settings. We would like to ensure that healthcare providers are taking precautions to prevent transmission of influenza-like illnesses within the office setting. Providers must take steps to ensure a safer environment for patients and staff. These include:

Institute Triage Policies

- Ask patients with influenza-like illnesses to identify themselves upon arrival.
- Ensure that patients with influenza-like illness are evaluated expeditiously.
- Consider scheduling patients with influenza-like illness at the end of the day or at a time separate from well visits.
- Consider having patients with influenza-like illnesses arrive through a separate entrance or wait in a different area from others.
- Ensure that you or a member of your staff calls ahead if you are referring a patient with an influenza-like illness to another medical facility.
- Encourage your staff and your patients with influenza-like illnesses to remain at home.

Follow Universal Respiratory Precautions

- Place signs in waiting areas describing *Universal Respiratory Precautions* or *Respiratory Etiquette*. Additional information and signage are available at www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm.
- Provide tissues in the waiting area to contain respiratory secretions when coughing or sneezing.
- Provide no-touch receptacles for disposal of used tissues.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers in waiting areas and encourage hand hygiene after contact with respiratory secretions.
- Provide symptomatic individuals with surgical masks to wear while interacting with others in the office.
- Encourage office staff to wear surgical masks when in close contact (i.e., within 3 feet) with symptomatic individuals and to practice good hand hygiene when interacting with these individuals. Currently available federal guidance

suggests that surgical masks provide adequate protection against seasonal influenza.

Practice Standard Precautions and Hand Hygiene

- Follow standard precautions including the use of gloves, masks, eye protection, and gowns if contact with mucous membranes or body fluids is anticipated. (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/gl_isolation_standard.html)
- Wash hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers before direct patient contact, after contact with respiratory secretions, after removal of gloves, or after contact with contaminated environmental surfaces.
- Wash hands before eating or drinking. Discourage eating or drinking in patient-care or reception areas.
- Eliminate or decrease the use of items shared by patients such as pens, clipboards and telephones. Re-double efforts to decontaminate environmental surfaces in waiting and patient care areas. Ensure that medical devices such as otoscopes, thermometers, and stethoscopes are appropriately cleaned between patients.

Ensure Immunization and Appropriate Use of Antiviral Agents

- Ensure that patients and staff with direct patient care responsibilities are immunized against influenza.
- Ensure that patients with influenza are diagnosed and treated with antiviral agents according to recommended guidelines. Healthcare providers should consider the use of rapid influenza testing to aid diagnosis. Guidelines for the use of antivirals can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/treatment>.

Understand Surveillance and Reporting Policies

- For disease reports or questions, contact South Central Public Health District Epidemiologists at 737-5936 or 737-5974 (Twin Falls) or 436-7185 (Rupert) during working hours.
- Report influenza to the Idaho Recorded Disease Report Line at 1-800-632-5927
- For emergency information, contact 1-800-632-8000 (*24-hour paging available*)