

TO: Members of Hartford Hospital Medical Staff

**FROM: Brian Cooper, M.D.
Director Infectious Disease Division**

RE: Swine Influenza and Physician Offices

DATE: April 30, 2009

SUGGESTIONS FOR HANDLING FEBRILE UPPER RESPIRATORY SYMPTOMS IN PHYSICIAN OFFICES

- All patients coming to the office should be screened by office staff for the presence of an influenza like illness:
 - Abrupt onset of fever plus any of the following: sore throat, cough, or myalgias.
- All patients who are positive for this screening should be given a surgical mask and asked to don it. These patients should be quickly moved to an exam room for evaluation.
- Healthcare workers completing the evaluation should don a surgical mask and gloves.
- As part of the evaluation, a rapid influenza test can be performed in the office, if available. Information on submitting samples for testing may be found at the Connecticut State Web site www.ct.gov/fluwatch under Healthcare Provider Information.
- Decisions regarding antiviral therapy should be based upon the clinical suspicion of influenza, the patients underlying health and comorbidities, and the patient's age. In general, a lower threshold for treatment is offered for those above the age of 65 and those less than age 5 years. Similarly, a low threshold for therapy is considered for those with serious comorbid conditions such as chronic heart and lung disease, especially COPD and CHF, chronic renal failure and chronic liver disease or diabetes. Pregnant women are also candidates for therapy if influenza is strongly suspected. Detailed treatment recommendations are enclosed with this memo.
- After the patient leaves the exam room all high touch services and fixtures should be wiped with a sanitizing wipe containing a surface disinfectant such as a Quaternary ammonium compound.
- Periodically, furniture in the waiting room should be wiped down in a similar manner.
- Strict attention to hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol based disinfectants is strongly encouraged for all office staff. Alcohol based disinfectants should be available in the waiting room and all patients encouraged to use it.

- Signage should be placed in the waiting room area encouraging patients to cover their cough and wash their hands frequently. A PDF copy of appropriate signage is included with this memo.
- **DO NOT SEND THE PATIENT TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM UNLESS THE PATIENT IS HAVING DIFFICULTY BREATHING OR ANOTHER POTENTIALLY LIFE THREATENING SITUATION HAS ARISEN.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PATIENTS WHO PHONE IN WITH INFLUENZA-LIKE ILLNESS

- Most people recover without any complications and they should be encouraged to remain at home if they are generally healthy. The patients should remain in their home for a total of 7 days or until at least 24 hours without symptoms has passed.
- If the patients must go out to the community, they should wear a surgical mask, carry tissues with them and take care to cover up their coughs. They should also observe frequent hand washing.
- Patients will be candidates to be seen in the office if they meet the above referenced age brackets, or have serious co-morbidities.
- A handout with patient instructions is included with this memo.
- Please note that this is an evolving and fluid situation and recommendations will likely be updated or modified over time.
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