THREAT ANALYSIS

**CDC advises those with mild flu symptoms to call rather than visit care sites**

A heavy influenza season is stretching the capacity of hospitals nationwide and public health authorities are increasingly calling for people with mild illness to avoid going to emergency departments (ED). The agency also continues to promote the flu shot, and the prescription of antiviral medications for patients who are hospitalized or at high risk for developing complications.

The flu is currently widespread in 43 states, with 29 reporting high flu activity, including the entire Midwest and Southeast and most of the East Coast. Hospitalizations are increasing across the country and the CDC said last week that flu activity had reached epidemic thresholds, which is not uncommon this time of year. There have been 21 pediatric deaths so far this season. The vast majority of cases have been influenza A(H3N2). This strain was included in this year's vaccine but it has since mutated to such a degree that the CDC is describing the vaccine as only about 33 percent effective. (Sources: CDC, NBC News, ABC News, Today)

The widespread flu activity has lead many hospitals across the country to implement visitor restrictions or go on diversion at times as acute care beds fill up and EDs experience long delays. The CDC is urging sick people to contact their healthcare providers by phone first to discuss whether they need to go in to a facility, in hopes that this will lighten the burden on hospitals and limit preventable spread of the virus. (Sources: The Roanoke Times, The Free Press, WTHR Indianapolis, CDC)

ACTION STEPS
1. Encourage all people who have not yet received the flu vaccine this season to do so as soon as possible. (Source: Flu.gov)

2. Participate in patient and public awareness campaigns to encourage people with mild flu symptoms to stay home and rest and hydrate and contact their primary or urgent care provider by phone if they need medical advice, rather than going to an ED. (Sources: CDC, The Free Press)

3. Review the list of populations at high risk of developing flu-related complications. Consider prescribing the recommended antiviral drugs for these and any hospitalized patients. Also, make sure staff who are working phone lines are familiar with the symptoms that may indicate a flu-related emergency, including rapid breathing, trouble breathing and bluish skin color in children, and chest pain or pressure, persistent vomiting and confusion in adults.

UPCOMING EVENTS

TUESDAY
06
No Mass Gatherings Scheduled

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