

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



STEVEN BELLONE
SUFFOLK COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

JAMES L. TOMARKEN, MD, MPH, MBA, MSW
Commissioner

TO: All EMS Providers and Firefighters in Suffolk County
All Ambulance Services and Fire Departments in Suffolk County

FROM: Nathaniel Bialek, BS, EMT-P, CCHP
Director, EMS & Public Health
Emergency Preparedness

DATE: December 27, 2018

RE: SEASONAL INFLUENZA UPDATE – *Respiratory Disease Precautions*

EMS providers should be mindful of the fact that we are into flu season. This week the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH) commissioner declared influenza to be widespread / prevalent across NY State. With that being said, agencies and providers are reminded that during flu season, precautions should be taken to reduce the risk of disease transmission to keep us, and our families healthy, and keep us available for service in our respective communities. All EMS Providers that are not allergic to influenza vaccination should receive the vaccine, even if you were vaccinated last year. This is proven to be a very effective strategy in reducing your risk of contracting influenza. According to the CDC, about 80,000 people died from influenza during the 2017-2018 season, significantly more than any other season in decades.

We should also be reminded that in addition to influenza, there are a host of other bacterial and viral communicable diseases circulating in the community that present as “influenza-like illness” within the United States, and communicated into the United States from afar, through global travel.

- EMS providers should be especially vigilant when encountering any patient with flu-like symptoms and we encourage you to observe **Universal Precautions**, circulate the air in the patient compartment during transportation, wash hands frequently, and decontaminate non-disposable patient care items and interior ambulance surfaces on a regular and frequent basis. This includes the use of gowns and gloves, eye protection and N95/N100 respirator on all providers and placing a non-rebreather oxygen mask with oxygen on patients. Per NYSDOH, EMS students doing clinical rotations in a hospital that cannot document they have received this year’s seasonal influenza vaccine will be required to wear a mask during all patient contacts, or may be declined admission to the rotation by the hospital.
- *Routine questions regarding recent travel history should become part of every patient assessment and reported to the receiving hospital.*
- Caution should also be used during droplet-producing procedures like positive pressure ventilation, suctioning, and administering nebulized medication. Initial patient assessments phases for History of Present Illness (HPI) and OPQRSTI should initially occur from about six (6) feet away from the patient, to ensure proper donning of PPE when indicated.



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360 Yaphank Ave, Suite 1B, Yaphank, NY 11980 (631) 852-5080 Fax (631) 852-5028

- *Hospital presentations should be made in all cases where patients exhibit signs & symptoms of the flu, well in advance of arrival at the hospital, and should include a transmission that you are transporting a patient with Influenza-Like Illness (ILI). Depending on local conditions, you may be asked to remain in the ambulance until your patient can be triaged by emergency department staff, or you may be directed to an alternate location in the emergency department to transfer your patient.*

Exposure Control Plans should be reviewed and updated accordingly, so that members with an occupational exposure are appropriately evaluated and treated, if indicated.

In conjunction with Suffolk County FRES Dispatch and local dispatch centers, the use of the “FC” suffix (Fever & Cough) will once again be added to emergency medical dispatch (EMD) determinant codes to give you as much pre-arrival information as possible about your patient(s). Recall that similar designation (“ID”) for Infectious Disease remains in effect when signs/symptoms indicate suspicion of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD).

Other precautionary measures to reduce the risk of transmission for seasonal flu include:

- washing your hands often with soap and warm water, particularly after doffing exam gloves;
- using alcohol-based hand cleansers, which are effective, if there is limited access to soap and warm water;
- avoiding people who are ill;
- staying home from work or school if you are sick;
- using a tissue when you cough, sneeze or spit, and dispose of the tissue in a covered trash bin;
- keeping hands away from your face, and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth;
- decontaminating shared space often, paying attention to phone receivers, microphones, keyboards, steering wheels, dashboards, countertops, and office equipment;
- refraining from sharing personal items such as forks, spoons, toothbrushes and towels; and
- receiving seasonal influenza vaccination, as this :
 - can help protect people who are at greater risk of getting seriously ill from flu, like older adults, people with chronic health conditions and young children (especially infants younger than 6 months old who are too young to get vaccinated).
 - may make your illness milder if you do get sick;
 - reduces the risk of more serious flu outcomes, like hospitalizations and deaths;
 - is an important preventive tool for responders with chronic health conditions; and
 - helps protect female responders who may be pregnant and their babies for up to 6 months after they are born, with one study showing that flu vaccine was 92% effective in preventing hospitalization of infants for flu.

Please review the NY State DOH Bureau of EMS Policy Statement 13-05 *Respiratory Disease Precautions*, which can be found at the following link: <https://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/ems/pdf/13-05.pdf>. Additional information may be found on the CDC’s website at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/index.html>

Please don’t hesitate to call (852-5080) or email Nathaniel.Bialek@suffolkcountyny.gov if you have any questions or require any additional assistance.

