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M E M O R A N D U M

To: All EMS Providers, Fire Districts and EMS Agencies

From: Jason Allen Winslow MD *JAW*
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Suffolk County Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services

Date: November 9, 2026

Subject: Influenza Advisory

On October 26th the New York State Department of Health declared that influenza is now prevalent in New York State. This year the seasonal influenza cases have been rising earlier than expected. At this time, all healthcare workers in New York State are advised to receive influenza immunization if they have not already done so. Annual immunization against influenza is the best means of keeping healthcare workers safe from illness as we expect the number of persons infected with influenza to rise steadily in the upcoming weeks.

Influenza symptoms vary from person to person and include: fever; headache; nasal congestion; sore throat; fatigue; muscle aches; cough; vomiting; and diarrhea. Symptom severity also varies from person to person.

Persons with heart disease, lung disease, auto-immune disease, diabetes, kidney failure, patients on chemotherapy and other immunosuppressive medications, pregnant patients, elderly patients and very young children under the age of 5 – these patients are at an increased risk for severe disease with influenza.

Influenza is transmitted person to person primarily through large-particle respiratory droplets and small particles in the air when a person sneezes or coughs. All patients who have influenza symptoms should have a surgical mask placed on them to cover the mouth and nose as a means of protection against transmission. All EMS providers should don a face mask themselves and wear medical gloves. EMS providers are reminded to use good hand washing hygiene and to be careful not to touch their own mouth nose and face while wearing gloves that could be contaminated with a patient's secretions. After a call on which there was a patient with suspected influenza, the patient compartment and all used equipment should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized.

When aerosol-generating procedures are performed, EMS providers should use extreme caution. This includes the use of CPAP, the use of nebulized medications, suctioning, advanced airways and mechanical ventilation. In these circumstances – when EMS providers are attending to patients with suspected influenza the use of an N95 mask, eye protection and a face shield are recommended as a means of providing additional protection. EMS providers should use their best judgment on when to perform aerosol-generating procedures for patients with suspected influenza.

EMS Agencies and Fire Districts should be monitoring the EMS provider workforce for the development of influenza among the EMS providers in their agencies in accordance with their agency policies.