

Memorandum

Date: April 1, 2022

To: Physicians

From: **Dr. Braden Manns on behalf of Dr. Francois Belanger**
Associate Chief Medical Officer

Dr. Laura McDougall
Senior Medical Officer of Health

RE: Sudden Increase in Influenza Cases and Outbreaks Reported in Alberta

While there were no reported influenza cases in Alberta in all of the 2020-21 season, and there have been only sporadic cases of influenza reported in the province since December 2021, we have seen a sudden spike in the past two weeks.

On March 13, the province had a total of 17 confirmed cases. As of March 26, a total of 124 laboratory-confirmed seasonal influenza cases were reported, including two Influenza A outbreaks reported this week. These are the first influenza outbreaks reported for this influenza season and both are in continuing care sites; one is in South Zone (Lethbridge) and the other is in Calgary Zone (Calgary). So far this season, 9 hospitalizations have been reported and no deaths.

We wanted to bring this sudden increase of cases to your attention for consideration in your differential diagnosis of patients with influenza-like illness (ILI). If a patient in an acute care setting (including emergency departments) has ILI symptoms and influenza testing is needed for clinical management, it must be requested in ADDITION to COVID-19 testing. Influenza testing is not automatically done when COVID-19 is requested. For acute care sites, influenza and RSV are tested together.

Influenza testing is included for all swabs submitted for residents with respiratory symptoms in continuing care settings except for group homes and shelters. The respiratory pathogen panel (RPP) is included for swabs from continuing care sites only until the respiratory pathogen responsible for the outbreak is identified.

As a reminder, COVID-19 outpatient treatments need to be started within five days and influenza anti-viral treatment within 48 hours of symptom onset. Influenza testing is not available at COVID-19 assessment centres. Physicians will need to use their clinical judgement about use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu) based on the likelihood of influenza transmission in your local area.

Primary care physicians should still consider sending patients eligible for COVID-19 outpatient therapy for COVID-19 testing. Eligibility requirements for COVID-19 PCR testing through assessment centres is available at [COVID-19 Immunization Booking | Alberta Health Services](#). Free of charge COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Tests are available through pharmacies listed here [Rapid testing at home | Alberta.ca](#).

The most recent Public Health Agency of Canada FLUWATCH report from March 12 reported low influenza activity across Canada, and it is uncertain whether we are starting to see widespread community transmission in Alberta. Alberta Health provides updated information every Thursday on influenza cases and outbreaks here [Alberta influenza statistics | alberta.ca](https://alberta.ca/alberta-influenza-statistics).

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