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May 8, 2013

Dear Colleague:

Due to the current outbreak of avian influenza A (H7N9) occurring among birds and people in mainland China since February 2013, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) is requesting that the healthcare community increase their surveillance for avian influenza A (H7N9) virus infection in persons presenting with acute febrile respiratory illness and an appropriate recent travel or exposure history.

As of May 1, 2013, the World Health Organization reports 128 cases which include 26 deaths (For the most recent case count visit:

http://www.who.int/influenza/human_animal_interface/influenza_h7n9/Data_Reports/en/). The median patient age is 65, and most confirmed infections have resulted in severe respiratory illness necessitating hospitalization. Milder illness has also been observed. Most cases had direct or indirect contact with poultry. No person-to-person transmission has been documented definitively and all cases have acquired this infection while in China. No human cases or infected birds have been documented in the United States.

In light of these events, LACDPH asks all medical professionals to take the following actions regarding suspected avian influenza A (H7N9) when evaluating a patient with acute fever and respiratory symptoms consistent with influenza:

- **Assess potential exposure by asking about:**
 - Recent travel (**within 10 days before illness onset**) to mainland China or any country where human cases of novel influenza A (H7N9) virus have recently been detected or where novel influenza A (H7N9) viruses are known to be circulating in animals
 - Recent contact with confirmed human cases of infection with avian influenza A (H7N9) virus
- **If potential exposure is identified as above, immediately report the suspect case to Acute Communicable Disease Control (ACDC) at (213) 240-7941.**
- **The LACDPH Public Health Laboratory will not accept or test specimens without prior approval from ACDC.**

Diagnostic Testing for Suspect Cases

To assist us in detecting the importation of avian influenza A (H7N9), we request that providers take the following steps if they have a possible case of H7N9:

- Report the suspect case to ACDC at 213-240-7941 immediately to get approval for influenza testing.

- Use appropriate infection control precautions when collecting specimens (see below).
- Order routine diagnostic tests for influenza and other suspected respiratory pathogens as clinically indicated. For laboratory safety reasons, do not order viral culture.
- Collect an additional nasopharyngeal swab or aspirate for influenza testing by the LACDPH Public Health Laboratory.

Please note that commercially available rapid influenza diagnostic tests may not detect avian influenza viruses in respiratory specimens (i.e., a negative rapid influenza diagnostic test result does not exclude infection with influenza viruses). Clinical treatment decisions should not be made on the basis of a negative rapid influenza diagnostic test result, since the test has only moderate sensitivity.

Infection Control

Healthcare personnel caring for patients under investigation for avian influenza A (H7N9) virus infection should adhere to standard precautions plus droplet, contact, and airborne precautions, including eye protection, until more is known about the transmission characteristics of the virus.

Antiviral Treatment

Because of the potential severity of illness associated with H7N9 virus infection, it is recommended that all H7N9 confirmed cases, probable cases, and cases under investigation receive antiviral treatment with a neuraminidase inhibitor as early as possible. Treatment should be initiated even if it is more than 48 hours after onset of illness. Laboratory testing and initiation of antiviral treatment should occur simultaneously; treatment should not be delayed for laboratory confirmation of influenza or H7N9 infection.

LACDPH does not recommend stockpiling oseltamivir or zanamivir. There is currently no sustained, efficient transmission of avian influenza viruses from person to person occurring anywhere in the world. Clinicians should not provide prescriptions to patients for stockpiling, since doing so might lead to a decrease in the supply of antivirals and might foster resistance to both human and avian influenza viruses if the drugs were used improperly. Additionally, it is unclear how persons with a personal stockpile would know when to initiate therapy or what would constitute an effective regimen.

Travel Recommendations

CDC does not recommend restricting travel to China and advises travelers to follow standard practices of good hand hygiene, food safety, and avoiding contact with live poultry.

For more information on avian influenza A (H7N9) please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h7n9-virus.htm>

As always, we appreciate the cooperation of the medical community in Los Angeles County and will update you with further information when it becomes available.

Sincerely,



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Director and Health Officer

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