



As temperatures appear to be transitioning to more typical fall like levels, it is important to begin our Influenza awareness. Seasonal influenza for Texas is October 1<sup>st</sup> until the beginning of May. While all indications point to a more representative influenza season, it is important to remain vigilant to potential changes in the virulence, spread, and impact of the various influenza viruses.

The first line of defense is obtaining an annual influenza immunization. The components of the vaccine are the same as last year's. The vaccine contains influenza A/H3N2 which appears to have the potential for being the dominant strain this year, A/H1N1, and a B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus.

Second, it is important to utilize the concept of "respiratory etiquette" and the use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) recommendations for preventive measures for EMS providers.

Transmission of seasonal flu occurs mainly through person-to-person transmission through coughing or sneezing by people infected with the influenza virus and contact with environmental surfaces contaminated with secretions from infected persons.

It is important to ensure that the appropriate levels of PPE are available for both providers and patients. Now is the time to review stocking levels within each response vehicle and make certain the necessary items are available.

While there are no current plans to re-initiate the "ILI" alerts from Communications, any information that would indicate the prudent implementation of "respiratory etiquette" should be shared with all responders and appropriate steps should be initiated.

All providers should be attentive to minimizing the transfer of any potentially infectious materials acquired during patient contact to medical equipment, stretchers, and other ancillary tools so as to lessen the chances of cross contamination and infection.

Additionally, exercise caution in the removal of your PPE to prevent inadvertent self-inoculation in the event the PPE has been contaminated with potentially infectious materials. Initiate hand hygiene as soon as feasible after doffing your PPE.

It is vitally important that the EMS community get in the habit of using Standard Precautions, such as donning Personal Protective Equipment and placing a surgical mask on the patient when appropriate, while treating all patients with a

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suspected infectious respiratory disease. Changing routine habits to include these measures will allow EMS providers to protect themselves and their patients against known infectious diseases such as seasonal influenza as well other new emerging diseases.

Your continued vigilance during the influenza season should ensure a more safe and healthful period.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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