

**WHATCOM COUNTY
Health Department**

*Leading the community in promoting health
and preventing disease.*



Regina A. Delahunt
Director
Greg Stern, M.D.
Health Officer

October 21, 2016

To: Whatcom County Long Term Care Facilities
Re: Influenza Surveillance

Dear Facility Administrators and Infection Control Coordinators:

The Whatcom County Health Department conducts surveillance on influenza activity in the community. As part of this surveillance, *we require that long-term care facilities report suspected or confirmed outbreaks of respiratory illness to our department.*

An outbreak is defined as:

- A sudden increase in acute febrile respiratory illness over the normal background rate (e.g., 2 or more cases of acute respiratory illness occurring within 72 hours of each other). Acute febrile respiratory illness is defined as fever $\geq 100^{\circ}$ F AND one or more respiratory symptoms (runny nose, sore throat, laryngitis, or cough). However, please note that elderly patients with influenza may not develop a fever.

OR

- Any resident who tests positive for influenza.

You may either fax the acute febrile respiratory illness report form to (360) 778-6103 or call the Whatcom County Health Department's 24-hour Communicable Disease Report Line at (360) 778-6150 and provide the information from the reporting form.

The health department can assist in evaluating influenza activity in your facility by consulting with you regarding laboratory testing at no cost through the State Public Health Laboratory. It is very important to consider testing prior to implementing antiretroviral medications to determine that the organism is not resistant to the therapy. For information on testing at the State Public Health Lab: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/301-018-InfluenzaTestingPHL.pdf>

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PUBLIC HEALTH
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HEALTHIER WHATCOM COUNTY
www.whatcomcounty.us/health

1500 North State Street
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Recommendations for Prevention and Control of Influenza Outbreaks in Long Term Care Facilities

- See <http://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/5100/fluoutbrk-LTCF.pdf> for a useful checklist on the strategies for the prevention and control of influenza in your facility. Please make sure to notify the Whatcom County Health Department in the event of an influenza outbreak in your facility and we will assist you with the management of this event.
 - Key steps include:
 - **Vaccination**-Upon admission, state law (RCW 74.42.285 and WAC 388-97-1340) requires LTCFs to inform, verbally and in writing, residents or their legal representative about the benefits of receiving flu vaccination. LTCFs must also make available flu vaccination annually to their residents. Influenza vaccination is the best means to prevent influenza and its complications among residents and staff of LTCFs. *Therefore, unless contraindicated for medical reasons, influenza vaccination is strongly recommended annually for all residents and employees (both medical and non-medical) of LTCFs.*
 - **Hand Hygiene, Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette, and Personal Protection**-
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm>
 - **Testing**-Testing for influenza should occur when any resident has signs and symptoms that could be due to influenza. When influenza is circulating in the surrounding community of the LTCF, a high index of suspicion should be maintained. For updates on influenza activity in Whatcom County see:
<http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/DocumentCenter/View/6198>
 - **Use of Antiviral Medications**-
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/index.htm>
 - **Isolation of ill residents, restricting new admissions, and exclusion of ill staff and visitors from the facility.**

Additional guidance for managing influenza outbreaks in long term care facilities is available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/ltc-facility-guidance.htm>

If you wish to discuss any part of reporting or need assistance in evaluating a situation in your facility, please call the communicable disease program at (360) 778-6100 during business hours 8:30am-4:30pm, Monday through Friday.

Sincerely,

Wendy Hancock, RN, BSN, CIC
Public Health Nurse