

Severe Respiratory Illness Alert: Mexico



To: Physicians and Nurse Practitioners, Hospital, Long Term Care Facilities

Date: April 22, 2009

The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion were contacted on April 20, 2009 by the Public Health Agency of Canada regarding a number of severe respiratory illness (SRI) cases occurring in various locations of south and central Mexico.

The cases presented with influenza-like symptoms that rapidly progressed to severe respiratory distress in about 5 days. Many required mechanical ventilation. Some patients have died. Most cases occurred in previously healthy young adults between 25 to 44 years old. Some health care workers are affected.

Some specimens have tested positive for influenza A and B viruses. However, it is not clear at this stage whether these cases represent isolated events or whether they are linked. Furthermore, there is no evidence at present to suggest infection with an unusual pathogen, including a novel strain of influenza.

Recommendations for Health Care Providers:

1. Actively look for cases of SRI, particularly in persons recently returned (within 2 weeks) from Mexico, and report information to the Health Unit (705)743-1000.
2. Continue to identify and report unusual clusters of febrile respiratory illness or SRI in the community or health care setting to the Health Unit (705)743-1000.
3. Isolate patients who fit the above categories (travel and SRI) using droplet precautions and treat in a single room as per the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC) guidelines, Preventing Febrile Respiratory Illnesses, Reprinted March 2008 at http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/infectious/diseases/ic_fri.html

Test patients who have these symptoms for:

- a. Common bacterial respiratory pathogens
- b. Common respiratory viral pathogens (i.e. influenza A/B, RSV, adenovirus, parainfluenza)
- c. Atypical bacterial pathogens such as *Mycoplasma pneumonia*, *Chlamydomphila pneumonia*, *Legionella pneumophila*

For more information on testing, refer to the Specimen Collection Guide:

www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/pub/labs/specimen.html

Specimens that are negative for these pathogens should be referred to the Public Health Laboratory. For possible further testing information, call: (800)640-7221 during regular office hours and after-hours, call (416)605-3113.

For more information, call Jan Self, Marilyn Mitchell, Deborah Pick, Simon Lee or Wanda Tonus at (705)743-1000.