TO: All EMS Providers and Firefighters in Suffolk County
All Ambulance Services and Fire Departments in Suffolk County

FROM: Robert Delagi, MA, NREMT-P
Chief, Prehospital Medical Operations and
Acting Director

DATE: October 15, 2012

RE: SEASONAL INFLUENZA UPDATE – Respiratory Disease Precautions

EMS providers should be mindful of the fact that we are into our seasonal flu season, and precautions should be taken to reduce the risk of disease transmission to keep us, and our families healthy, and keep us available for service in our respective communities. Public Health Officials expect very low levels of H1N1 to remain in circulation, and behave like seasonal influenza. In addition to H1N1, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has anticipated that other strains, such as H3N2 (also Type A and Type B virus) will be co-circulating this year. These three (3) strains have been included in the 2012-2013 influenza vaccination. All health care providers that are not allergic to influenza vaccination should receive the vaccine, even if you were vaccinated last year. This is proven to be a very effective strategy in reducing your risk of contracting influenza.

Influenza (“flu”) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses, and can cause mild to severe illness, and at times, can lead to death. Symptoms of the flu include: fever; headache; fatigue; cough; sore throat; runny/stuffy nose; muscle aches; and in some cases, particularly those involving children, symptoms such as: nausea; vomiting; and diarrhea. Complications of the flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration and exacerbation of chronic medical conditions, such as: congestive heart failure; asthma; and diabetes. Flu virus is spread mainly by respiratory secretions from person-to-person through coughing or sneezing, and can also be spread when one touches an object with flu virus on it, and then touches their mouth or nose. The virus can be transmitted to others beginning one (1) day before symptoms develop and up to seven (7) days after one becomes symptomatic.

- EMS providers should be especially vigilant when encountering any patient with flu-like symptoms this time of year and we encourage you to observe Universal Precautions, circulate the air in the patient compartment during transportation, wash hands frequently, and decontaminate non-disposable patient care items and interior ambulance surfaces frequently. This includes the use of gowns and gloves, eye protection and N95/N100 respirator on all providers and placing a non-rebreather oxygen mask on all patients.

Caution should also be used during droplet-producing procedures like positive pressure ventilation, suctioning, and administering nebulized medication. Initial patient assessments phases for History of Present Illness (HPI) and OPQRSTI should initially occur from about six (6) feet away from the patient, to ensure proper donning of PPE when indicated.

Continued.
• Hospital presentations should be made in all cases where patients exhibit signs & symptoms of the flu, well in advance of arrival at the hospital, and should include a transmission that you are transporting a patient with Influenza-Like Illness (ILI). Depending on local conditions, you may be asked to remain in the ambulance until your patient can be triaged by emergency department staff, or you may be directed to an alternate location in the emergency department to transfer your patient.

• Exposure Control Plans should be reviewed and updated accordingly, so that members with an occupational exposure are appropriately evaluated and treated, if indicated.

• Vaccination is the best prevention for the flu! Contact your health care provider, or check with your local pharmacy, to obtain flu vaccine.

• In conjunction with Suffolk County FRES Dispatch, the use of the “FC” suffix (Fever & Cough) will be added to emergency medical dispatch (EMD) determinant codes to give you as much pre-arrival information as possible about your patient(s).

For additional information, please visit the CDC website at the links below.

http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/

Other precautionary measures to reduce the risk of transmission for seasonal flu include:

• washing your hands often with soap and warm water;
• using alcohol-based hand cleansers, which are effective, if there is limited access to soap and warm water;
• avoiding people who are ill;
• staying home from work or school if you are sick;
• using a tissue when you cough, sneeze or spit, and dispose of the tissue in a covered trash bin;
• keeping hands away from your face. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth;
• cleaning shared space often, paying attention to phone receivers, microphones, keyboards, steering wheels dashboards, countertops, and office equipment; and
• refraining from sharing personal items such as forks, spoons, toothbrushes and towels.

Please review the NY State DOH Bureau of EMS Policy Statement 03-11 Respiratory Disease Precautions, which can be found at the following link: http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/ems/pdf/03-11.pdf

Please don’t hesitate to call (853-5800) or email robert.delagi@suffolkcountyny.gov if you have any questions or require any additional assistance.

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