

Example Strategy for Improving Influenza Specimen Submissions and Data

Lessons from Illinois

Provided by Dawn Nims

The idea behind the Customized Influenza Surveillance Reports, “Sentinel Report Cards,” came from Shawn Richards at the Indiana State Health Department. Shawn shared this idea during one of our Midwest influenza conference calls and she then sent out a template example to the Coordinators. This example is what we used to develop the reports for the Illinois sentinels.

We chose to develop Customized Influenza Surveillance Reports for our sentinel sites for a few different reasons. Although we have distributed memos regarding reporting and specimen submission requirements/recommendations prior to the season starting, we found that some sentinel sites were still unclear as to what was being asked of them (mainly when pertaining to specimen submissions), so this gave us the opportunity to re-educate the sentinel providers. Also, during the beginning of the season, the level of influenza specimen submissions from sentinel sites was below our goal, so we sent a customized report to our sites that participate both in outpatient ILI (ILINet) and virologic surveillance during the mid-point of the season to encourage reporting and specimen submission. This report made clearer what we were requesting of sites for the remainder of the season. A review of virologic surveillance during past seasons determined a large need to increase specimen submission in Illinois by improving the participation of current sites and the recruitment of new sites. The reasons for low participation in virologic surveillance by the current sites has not been studied but was likely due to lack of understanding of participation requirements and a scaling back of routine influenza testing by the IDPH lab within the past few years. Information was provided to laboratories to discontinue submitting specimens to the state laboratory for routine testing, so memos and surveillance reports were thought to aid in getting select sentinel sites back in the habit of submitting specimens for surveillance purposes in order to meet the goals of the CDC-APHL Right Size Initiative.

We set up the reports using the template provided to us from Indiana, while making modifications that were Illinois specific. We also simplified the report by making a three-tiered ranking system (gold, green, red). We have two different templates; one for sites that are involved in both outpatient ILI and virologic surveillance and then another for sites who only participate in outpatient ILI surveillance. We wanted each site to understand why we conduct surveillance, what is done with the data, what the goals are in Illinois and what accomplishments we have made thus far in enhancing our surveillance efforts. With that in mind, we provided a fairly lengthy narrative along with specimen submission data comparing this current season from last season to see all of the progress we are making together in just one short year. The Influenza Coordinator, along with assistance from the Director of VPD Surveillance, tailored the report template from Indiana to meet Illinois’s needs. We then gathered and analyzed data provided from ILINet and our laboratory.

We found that using these reports provided our Sentinel sites with a clear understanding of what our goals were in Illinois regarding influenza surveillance and what is done with the data they are providing to us. There have been a few sites that have commented that they really like seeing their data presented this way for their own awareness of the influenza/ILI activity that their site is experiencing.