

3 SEASONAL DISEASES

a Influenza — awaiting the 2016 season

The influenza season is considered to have started when the detection rate of surveillance specimens tested at the NICD has risen above 10% and is sustained for ≥ 2 weeks. This criterion has not yet been met, and therefore the season has not commenced. There have been sporadic detections of influenza reported from the influenza surveillance programmes: influenza- like illness surveillance (ILI) (systematic ILI at public health clinics and viral watch) and pneumonia surveillance for severe disease in hospitalized patients: In the first 13 weeks of 2016, 63 specimens were received from Viral Watch sites. Of these, one was positive for influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and five were positive for influenza B. During the same period, 234 specimens were received from two ILI sites, one was positive for influenza A(H3N2) and one for influenza B. In this time period, specimens from 669 patients with severe respiratory illness were received from the 6 sentinel sites. Influenza B was detected in the specimens of four patients.

Influenza vaccination

Influenza vaccination, which provides protection against at least three strains of influenza each

season, remains the most effective measure to prevent illness and possibly fatal outcomes. Protecting those who are at increased risk of severe influenza outcomes plays an important role in management and prevention of respiratory illnesses. Individuals at risk of influenza and severe disease include, among others pregnant women, and those vulnerable due to pre-existing illnesses or risk factors. The influenza vaccine for the 2016 season is available at public health facilities and private pharmacies. Clinicians are encouraged to vaccinate individuals in the groups that are targeted for influenza vaccination. Vaccines should be given sufficiently early to provide protection for the influenza season, though it is never too late to vaccinate. A protective antibody response takes about 2 weeks to develop. Detailed recommendations on target groups, dosages and contraindications for the vaccine during the 2016 influenza season can be accessed in the February issue of the South African Medical Journal: available at <http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/>

Sources: Centre for Respiratory Diseases and Meningitis, NICD-NHLS (cherylc@nicd.ac.za)