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## Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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### **State to alter how hospitalized flu patients are counted**

*State now asking for reports of patients hospitalized with pneumonia and influenza syndrome*

(Anchorage, AK) — The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services is revising how it tracks hospitalized patients with influenza.

Beginning Nov. 1, 2009, the state of Alaska is asking hospitals to report the number of patients hospitalized with signs and symptoms (syndrome) of pneumonia and influenza, in addition to the number of people hospitalized with laboratory-confirmed influenza infection. Previously, only patients with lab-confirmed influenza, either seasonal or H1N1, were counted in the report.

Alaska reports hospitalizations and deaths to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) every Tuesday and publishes the results on the state Epidemiology Web site on Wednesdays.

“After discussing this choice with hospital infection control practitioners across the state, it was determined that only counting hospitalized patients with positive laboratory tests for influenza was resulting in a substantial underrepresentation of the true burden of flu-related hospitalizations in Alaska,” state epidemiologist Dr. Joe McLaughlin said. “Because this new ‘syndromic’ reporting system is less restrictive, it will result in a substantial rise in the number of Alaska cases reported to CDC each week.”

Seventeen other states are already reporting hospitalizations based on clinical diagnosis of pneumonia and influenza syndrome. The CDC is expecting more states to follow suit.

In order to better evaluate flu-related mortality this flu season, the state is also opening up flu-related death reporting to any person who died with lab-confirmed influenza infection, rather than just lab-confirmed flu deaths among hospitalized patients.

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