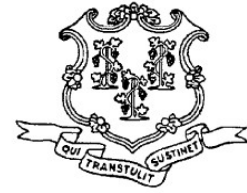


News



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 19, 2003

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DPH Recommends Universal Respiratory Etiquette Strategy to Hospitals

Objective is to reduce spread of respiratory infections by extending infection control practices to outpatient waiting rooms and to patients

Hartford – The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) announced today that it has encouraged Connecticut hospitals to take preventive action to reduce the potential for person-to-person spread of serious respiratory infections like influenza or SARS and other respiratory diseases in waiting areas of emergency departments and outpatient clinics.

DPH has encouraged Connecticut hospitals to implement, as feasible, draft universal respiratory etiquette guidance issued by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to protect patients, visitors and staff working in waiting areas in emergency department and outpatient clinical settings from exposure to respiratory diseases such as influenza, pneumonia, pertussis (whooping cough), tuberculosis, SARS and other coronaviruses, and other transmissible respiratory disease illnesses.

Concern about the severity of this year's flu season – and the possibility that SARS may be back this winter – have given the respiratory etiquette strategy recommendations a special urgency. However, those high-profile diseases are not the only target of the effort.

“Regardless of whether SARS returns this year – this effort is important,” said Dr. James Hadler, Connecticut State Epidemiologist. “Many of us are vulnerable to a host of other respiratory bugs, such as influenza, and many of them can make us seriously ill. Waiting areas in health care settings where patients with transmissible acute infections sit side-by-side with persons with injuries and other complaints are potential focal points for transmission of these infections to others. No one feels entirely comfortable sitting next to a person with a cough or fever and runny nose – and for good reason,” stated Dr. Hadler. “When a patient with a transmissible disease is examined, health care providers take precautions. It makes sense to extend this practice to the waiting room.”

In the coming weeks, persons coming to an emergency department may see a supply of masks, posters and other patient information asking them to take and wear a mask if they have cough, runny nose, sore throat or persistent sneezing. They may also be advised to clean their hands if they cough or sneeze into them. Waterless hand hygiene materials may also be available to make it easy to do so. For young children and persons who cannot wear a mask, tissues will be available and frequent hand cleansing is advised. “Don't be surprised if you are asked to wear a mask if you're coming to be seen because you think you may have the flu” says Dr.

Hadler. “It is for the protection of those around you. We believe these new procedures can help to minimize the risk of disease transmission in the health care setting.”

Based on key elements of the draft CDC universal respiratory etiquette strategy, the department is encouraging hospitals to minimize disease transmission potential by:

- Providing masks to all patients and to all non-patient visitors who have symptoms of an infectious respiratory illness (defined as cough, runny nose, sore throat or sneezing) with instructions on proper use and disposal of masks and on hand-hygiene.
- For those who cannot wear a mask, providing tissues and instructions on when to use them, where to dispose of them and on hand-hygiene after using them.
- Providing hand hygiene materials in waiting room areas and encouraging persons with respiratory symptoms to perform hand-hygiene.
- Instructing registration and triage area staff of their risk of exposure to microbes spread by droplets and to consider wearing masks whenever registering or assessing patients who have respiratory symptoms and are not wearing a mask.
- Where possible, designating an area in waiting rooms where patients with respiratory symptoms can be segregated (ideally by at least 3 feet) from others without respiratory symptoms.

Healthcare providers in other healthcare settings are also being asked to try implementing these precautions in their waiting areas.

Yale-New Haven Health System is taking a lead role in supporting the recommendations as a state-designated Hospital Bioterrorism Center of Excellence. “We have already implemented the universal respiratory etiquette guidelines at Yale-New Haven Hospital, Bridgeport Hospital and Greenwich Hospital, and we encourage all acute care hospitals to do the same,” stated Christopher Cannon, Systems Director, Yale-New Haven Health System.

“Hartford Hospital fully supports the DPH efforts to reduce the potential for spread of communicable respiratory illness within hospitals and clinics. Infection Control staff at the hospital have been busy implementing the essential elements of the guideline by educating staff members, distributing surgical masks for patient use and ensuring that hand hygiene materials are present in all patient waiting areas,” said Dr. Brian Cooper, Director of the hospital’s Infectious Disease Department.

Outside of healthcare settings, the public is also asked to do their part to minimize the spread of bacteria and viruses spread by respiratory droplets. “Respiratory etiquette applies in everyday situations, as well as the health care setting,” emphasized Dr. Hadler.

“We can all help to prevent the spread of respiratory disease every day – at home, at work, and while we’re out in public,” he said. In order to minimize the risk of spreading respiratory disease, health officials recommend that you:

- **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue**, whenever you cough or sneeze. And then **throw the tissue away**.
- If you **don’t have a tissue**, cough or sneeze into your **sleeve**.
- And **clean your hands often, especially after coughing or wiping your nose** – with **soap and water**, or with an **alcohol-based, waterless hand sanitizer**.

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