



Respiratory Illness Outbreak in Alabama

Alabama public health officials are investigating a cluster of severe respiratory infections with an unknown cause around the Dothan area.

Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) said in a press release yesterday that seven people were hospitalized with similar symptoms of cough, fever and shortness of breath. Two of the patients have died. A report from local media stated that the hospitalizations began around May 16th at the Southeast Alabama Medical Center.

The ADPH states that two of the patients tested positive for influenza, however, it is unclear what role the viruses have played in the current cluster. The case age range is broad from persons in the early 20's to the late 80's and there is no apparent epidemiological link between them. According to a local report yesterday, the cases come from an eight county service area in southeastern Alabama near the Georgia and Florida borders.

Local health officials state that it is too early in the investigation to declare if the illness is contagious, however no family members have become ill so far.

There has been no evidence that the cases traveled to either China or the Middle East where H7N9 influenza virus or the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) are present.

The ADPH has asked healthcare providers to report all patients hospitalized with cough, shortness of breath, and pneumonia from an unknown cause, regardless of rapid flu test results.

The ADPH and the Houston County Health Department are conducting the investigation and have consulted with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

EMS providers in the surrounding areas should be aware of this cluster of patients and practice good protective techniques including the use of PPE and frequent hand washing. Patients exhibiting the symptoms listed above should be brought to the attention of health care providers for further investigation.

http://vitals.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/05/21/18404332-mysterious-respiratory-illness-strikes-7-in-alabama-2-dead?lite

http://www.dothaneagle.com/news/article_c7cfba0a-c234-11e2-9bc6-0019bb30f31a.html

<http://www.adph.org/>

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