



VITALS


A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

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Bugs In The News

It's hard to avoid news about potential pandemics and new lethal viruses. Perhaps it's even harder to make sense of all the information that bombards us about them. The specialized language thrown about is not usually defined. This makes it difficult to make a realistic threat assessment.

On June 1, 2009, the CDC reported that novel H1N1 2009 (Remember when it was called "Swine Flu"?) has been found in all 50 states. The 10,053 cases reported represent about 1 in 20 cases. That makes the actual number of cases about 200,000. This bug has a pattern different than that of seasonal flu. The flu season seems to be running unusually long, and the average flu victim is a teenager. Dr. Anne Schuchat from the CDC postulates that this strain of H1N1 acts like regular seasonal flu. While some older people may have partial immunity due to exposure to a strain of H1N1 that was around in 1957, it is unknown if the antibodies will confer protection against infection. However, the antibodies could reduce the severity of disease.



Speaking of severity, have you heard about Lujo, the new hemorrhagic virus from South Africa? Lujo is the first new virus of its kind to be discovered in over three decades. Named after the cities in which it was found, Lusaka and Johannesburg, it killed four out of five people who were infected; one was a paramedic. The index patient was air transferred from Zambia to South Africa. Lujo is an arenavirus, which spreads among people who come in contact with infected rodent waste products via contaminated dust or food. It is likely that Lujo was transmitted to the healthcare workers via aerosols or infected body fluids.

With old bugs like H1N1 coming back in new forms of unknown virulence and new scary bugs like Lujo emerging, now is a good time to re-assess our approach to infections. The next several articles will deal with this issue from several perspectives. They include: "What's all this stuff about H1N1?", "How does H1N1 get around?", "N95 versus P100", "Cleaning Transport Vehicle during an Influenza Pandemic", "CDC Interim Guidelines for PSAPs", and "Business Pandemic Influenza Checklist."