



## Section 3

# Preparing for Seasonal Flu

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### Know When Flu is in Your Community

One thing you can count on every year is that flu will likely show up in your community sometime between mid-October and April. During some years, the severity of the flu will be worse than in others. To prepare for the inevitable, there are several things an LTCF can do to monitor flu activity as the season approaches.

First, the CDC reports flu activity in the United States on a weekly basis. If you have access to the Internet, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/fluactivity.htm>.

The type of information you can find there is summarized below:

#### *The CDC Surveillance Network*

##### **Reports weekly flu surveillance data at the national level**

- Clinical lab testing reports from 130 labs
- Mortality data from 122 cities where pneumonia or influenza is mentioned on death certificate
- State and regional health departments contribute data to estimate flu activity
- 1200 sentinel healthcare providers report total number of patient visits and percentage of influenza-like illness
- Data lag time > 2 weeks

Another good source of information about flu activity may be found at <http://www.fluSTAR.com>. At this Web site you can sign up for flu alerts so that when flu does appear in your community, you will be the first to know. There is no charge to use the FluSTAR Web site. Below is a summary of the FluSTAR.com Web site:

#### *The FluSTAR Surveillance Network*

- **www.fluSTAR.com**
- Real-time surveillance for tracking flu
- Identifies influenza outbreaks at regional and national level
- Reports weekly data from multiple sources
  - 200 sentinel laboratories nationwide that assay influenza virus
  - 400 physicians reporting rapid assay test results from 75 major metropolitan areas
  - ICD-9 codes collected weekly from a database of 240,000 physicians

Included in this tool kit is a DVD that presents a 6-minute video of how a small town in rural Illinois took steps to avoid a major flu outbreak after receiving a FluSTAR email alert.

### **Know What Flu Looks Like in Elderly Residents**

Classic influenza is characterized by fever, chills, cough, malaise, sudden onset, headache, and sore throat. In the elderly, the appearance of flu may be somewhat different. When flu is known to be in the community, look for the combination of fever and cough, which tends to be the best indicator of influenza infection.<sup>1</sup> Lethargy, anorexia, and acute-onset confusion are also more likely to be present in elderly individuals.<sup>2</sup> The quick reference chart of flu signs and symptoms that follows may be used during flu season by your certified nurse assistants to help them more easily recognize flu.

#### References

1. Monto A, Gravenstein S, Elliott M, et al. Clinical signs and symptoms predicting influenza infection. *Arch Intern Med.* 2000;160:3243-3247.
2. Bradley S. Prevention of influenza in long-term-care facilities. *Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol.* 1999;20(9):629-637.