

TARRANT

The Alberta Recording and Research Network
Tracking Influenza in Alberta



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It's fall, and a new flu season is starting!

While things are relatively quiet in the summer, the fall is here, and the flu season is approaching. After a light season last year, we can probably expect a more intensive one this year, especially if we get the virus that seems to be circulating in Australia. We will again contact each office to help you get ready for the coming flu season, before we get busier with flu in winter!

If you have not started already, start sending your data now! We need the baseline, so we can see when incidence starts to rise. Keep alert: TARRANT recorders often provide the first influenza isolate of the season.

New Sentinels

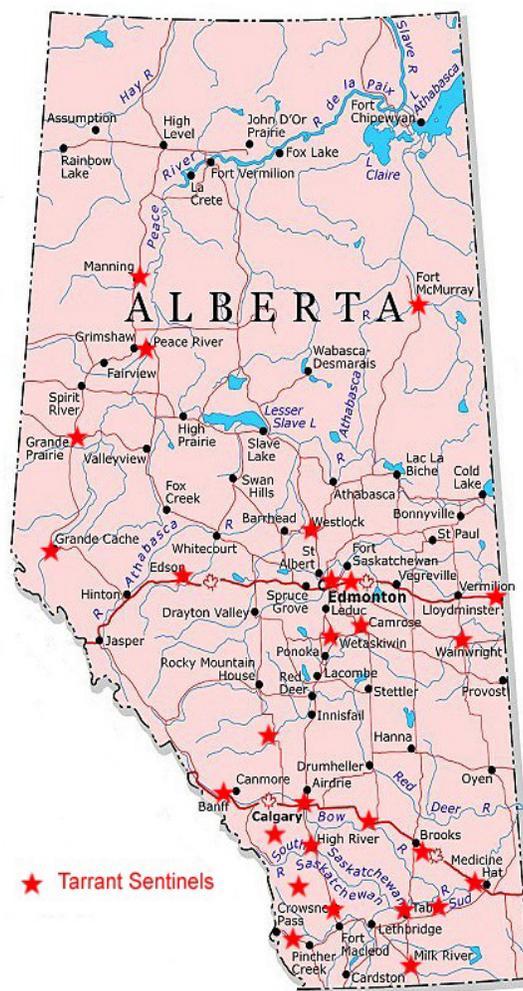
Welcome to the new sentinel physicians! During the summer, we have contacted many physicians across Alberta, inviting them to participate in the program. So far, 9 physicians from Calgary Health Region, Central East, and Northern Lights have agreed to participate in the program recently. Some of them have already started sending data. We hope to receive data from everyone soon.

Now TARRANT covers all the nine health regions in Alberta. The map shows the current coverage of TARRANT physicians.

Influenza Activity Update

Many people tend to think we can forget about flu in summer. However, with increased international travels, flu can come anytime with travelers from countries in the southern hemisphere in their flu season. There were two cases in the Calgary region, both imported and traveling to Banff: one from Florida and one from Australia, where there is a severe winter epidemic that is shutting off elective surgery in many of the hospitals. The third case was a 51 year Calgary male with no history of travel. This demonstrated again the importance of year-round surveillance with flu just a plane ride away!

Plans are being made for the annual immunisation season, which will be interesting because of the policy that no vaccine will be available for private sale. The main targets of immunisation in Alberta will be young children and the elderly. This compares with Ontario, which has the ambitious target of immunising the whole population.



Avian Flu

Avian flu has expanded its geographical range. The first cases have been reported in Indonesia: a man and his two young daughters all died. Both Russia and Kazakhstan reported outbreaks of avian influenza in poultry in late July, and confirmed H5N1 as the causative agent in early August. Deaths in migratory birds, infected with the virus, have also been reported. You can get full information by reading the WHO website. http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/, or just Google on WHO influenza, and you will get there.



A recently published article H5N1 influenza and the implications for Europe¹ shares the concern of another pandemic influenza associated with avian flu viruses. Spread of avian flu to most countries in South East Asia and recently to Russia and Kazakhstan raised the concern. The paper discusses European readiness for a pandemic flu that might come at any time.

Universal Influenza Immunization Program vs. Targeted Program

The Canadian Institute of Health Research has requested research to compare the Ontario outcome with locations here the policy is different. We are exploring whether we can do a study in Alberta, using our data and more that we can obtain from the virology laboratory, and schools, institutions and other locations where epidemics hit hard. It may also be important to link the influenza cases to their immunization history. We will keep in touch with you about what we could do, but we must ensure there is no unreasonable burden of data collection.

Electronic Data Transfer

Another clinic in our program started sending flu data electronically. While this reduces the paper work for flu reporting, it may also require extra attention to coding. Sentinels who are using automatic data transfer need to code influenza positively, i.e. use code 487 for ILI and code 466 or 486 for LRTI, and specifically, i.e. do not use these codes for anything else. We will only be able to capture the flu activities in your clinic if you code them properly in your computer system.

If you would like to explore automatic data capture from your electronic records, call us and we will see what we can do.

¹ Coulombier D, Ekdahl, E. H5N1 influenza and the implications for Europe. BMJ 2005;331:413-414