

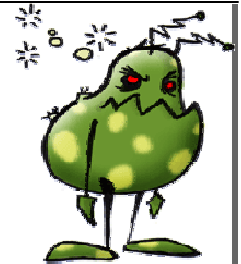
February
2010

TARRANT VIRAL WATCH

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Thank you TARRANT Sentinels



Thanks to you, our sentinel physicians, TARRANT continues to be an important source of influenza surveillance data, which contributes to the provincial, national, and global picture of influenza activity. Following the H1N1 pandemic, the value of surveillance systems like TARRANT has been emphasized. We encourage you to continue to take part in our initiative to provide important information about influenza activity in Alberta. We also encourage you to mention this initiative to colleagues, as we are always looking to recruit more physicians to broaden the scope of our data. And you get your own data: TARRANT sentinels were the only community physicians who could send nasopharyngeal swabs in for testing at the height of the pandemic.

Mark your calendars: April 9 AGM in Calgary

Each spring **TARRANT** Viral Watch hosts its Annual General Meeting (AGM). The AGM brings together sentinels, public health representatives, laboratory personnel, and researchers interested in influenza.

The AGM helps to determine what direction and focus TARRANT will have for this coming year. Guest speakers will discuss topics relevant to family physicians. Please join us to give feedback and learn more about our program and initiatives. Travel costs are covered for TARRANT sentinels and their staff.

The AGM will be held on April 9th, 2010 in Calgary. Lunch will be provided prior to presentations in the afternoon.

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Survey Results: Physicians' Response to the H1N1 Pandemic

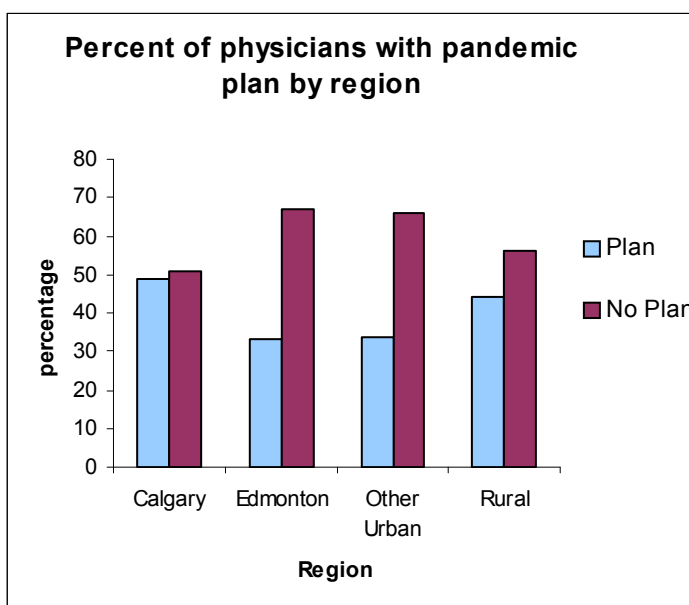
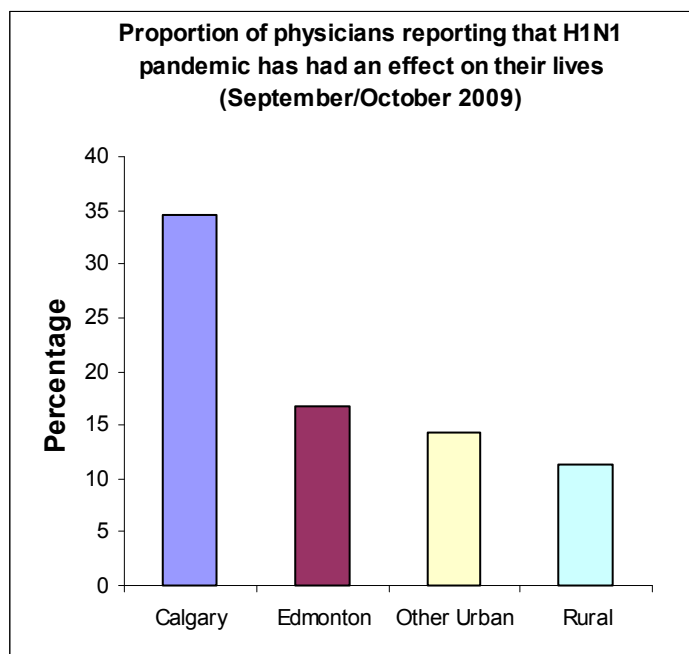
Emergence of the H1N1 pandemic in April 2009 served as a reminder of the importance of being prepared for future epidemics and pandemics. TARRANT staff conducted a survey of a random sample of physicians to gain information about family physicians' response to the pandemic. Our investigation included looking at how many primary care clinics have a pandemic preparedness plan and physicians' willingness to work during a pandemic.

The survey was conducted in September and early October just before the fall epidemic had begun. Therefore, the results reflect physicians' learning from the first wave and expectations of a severe epidemic.

We randomly selected one thousand physicians, stratified by 250 per region (Calgary, Edmonton, other urban, and rural), to receive a survey. Twenty-two percent of the surveys were completed and returned to us.

Some of the result highlights are as follows:

- ◆ The majority of family physicians (64%) were concerned about being infected with the pH1N1 due to the nature of their occupation.
- ◆ Seventy-eight percent of male physicians and 60% of female physicians indicated they would be willing to continue working despite the increased risk of falling ill themselves.
- ◆ Only 2% of female physicians and 29% of male physicians indicated they would continue to work if they or their partner were pregnant.



Looking for more information?

World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/>

Canadian Public Health Agency: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine_200904-eng.php

Alberta Health & Wellness: <http://www.health.alberta.ca/professionals/health-professionals.html>

Alberta Health Services Emergency Coordination Centre: ph. 403-955-9873 Toll-free: 1-877-228-3031

E-mail: ahs.ecc@albertahealthservices.ca Hours: 0800-1700, M-F.

Alberta Health Services H1N1 information: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/660.asp>

- ◆ There were regional variations in the change of service demand within clinics. More Calgary physicians reported increased demand during the initial wave of the current pandemic than in the other regions. Most physicians who experienced an increased service demand felt that it was manageable. However, some indicated that the increase in service demand resulted in shorter patient visits and left the physician more tired.
- ◆ Less than 50% of physicians had a pandemic plan in place for the upcoming fall/winter influenza season.
- ◆ Extra precautions clinics put in place during the first wave of the pandemic included posting signs on entrance doors and providing masks and hand sanitizer to all patients as they entered the clinic.
- ◆ Physicians reported increased hand washing practices between patient visits after the pandemic broke out in April.
- ◆ Few respondents found it difficult to obtain personal protective supplies such as masks, gowns, or gloves. However, 57% of Calgary physicians had trouble obtaining N95 masks for their clinics.
- ◆ Almost 60% of physicians felt their staff members would be fearful of dealing with potential cases of influenza during an outbreak or pandemic. Nearly three quarters of physicians felt there would not be enough replacement staff to maintain the clinic if their current staff became ill during a pandemic.
- ◆ Approximately 73% of physicians agreed or strongly agreed that the information from AHS was adequate, practical, up to date, timely, and they agreed with the information provided. This is an important feature as over 90% of physicians indicated that the family physician would be responsible for educating their staff members in a pandemic situation.

Responses to some survey questions varied by region. These regional differences need to be evaluated to ensure equitable care across the province. Although physicians generally agreed and supported information received from Alberta Health Services, many indicated they did not have a pandemic plan in place for the fall/winter. All levels of the healthcare system must cooperate to enable the use of best polices and practices in primary care clinics.

If you would like a full copy of the survey results, please contact the TARRANT office.

Wanted: TARRANT Sentinels

New sentinel peer referral program

We would like to expand our TARRANT network so we have improved surveillance throughout the province. Do you know of any clinics that would be interested in joining the Viral Watch program? We are always interested in increasing the number of active sentinels to replace those who are leaving or retiring. This year, we are particularly interested in increasing participation by clinics in Northern Alberta and in areas with a significant number of aboriginal patients.

Clinic: _____
 Physician/ nurse practitioner: _____
 Ph. _____ E-mail address: _____
 Suggested by: _____

Vaccine Effectiveness (VE) Study Update

Influenza-Like Illness

There is not much happening right now in terms of ILI in Alberta. The number of H1N1 cases has decreased dramatically, and there is no sign of seasonal flu at this time.

VE Study Recruitment

TARRANT is continuing to collect Alberta data for use in the vaccine effectiveness study coordinated by the BCCDC. If you are interested in collecting data on influenza vaccination please contact the TARRANT office.

June– October VE Study Payments

Invoices for VE study payments were sent out in early January. If you have not signed and returned your form, please do so as soon as possible. Payments will be sent to sentinels in February. If you did not receive the last VE study payment in the fall, and had returned your invoice, please contact us as soon as possible. Also, please let us know if you have not received a cheque by March from the U of C for the latest invoice.

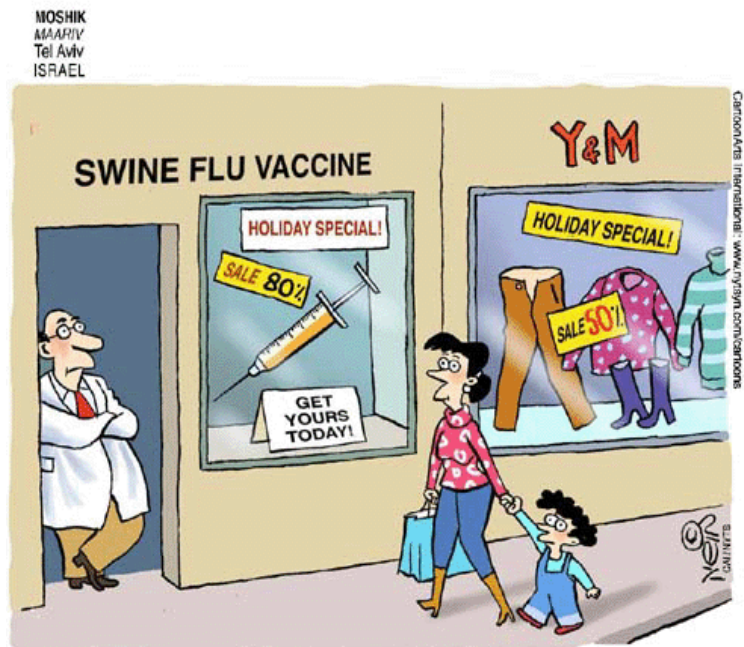
VE Study Lab Reqs

Please use the peach-colored VE study requisition forms only for ILI patients. We have been receiving some strange swab types lately!

New TARRANT Team Members

Leah Ricketson & Craig Pearce are the newest members of the TARRANT team, with Emily Medd's departure to Ottawa. Leah and Craig are both MSc students in Healthcare Epidemiology, Community Health Sciences, at the University of Calgary.

If you are attending the Family Medicine scientific assembly in Banff in February, please stop by the TARRANT booth! We will also have research posters with study results from the sentinel program.



Congratulations to Dr. R. Dahlke at CUPS, who swabbed 54 patients with completed VE study forms, and to Dr. S. Lim, with 46 completed study forms and swabs for patients with ILI or LRTI, making them the most active VE study physicians in Alberta during the summer months!

Weekly Reports of Virus Activity in Alberta

If you would like us to e-mail you weekly summary reports of viral activity in Alberta, please fax us your name and e-mail address (fax 403-270-4329) or e-mail: tarrant@ucalgary.ca.

Name: _____ E-mail: _____