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Changes to EMD Guidecards Flu Considerations

The State of New Jersey, Emergency Medical Dispatch Guidecards have been modified by the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) to address the up-coming flu season and the potential impact of the H1N1 virus. The intent is to help the calltaker identify signs and symptoms of the flu in people calling 9-1-1 for medical assistance. Changes in unit response and the transport and treatment of the patient will not occur at this time.

Modifications have been made to the "SICK PERSON" card. Previously the card mentioned signs and symptoms of the flu without listing them. The new card lists the common signs and symptoms and should be asked when appropriate. These include

Fever (usually high)

Headache

Extreme tiredness

Dry cough

Sore throat

Runny or stuffy nose

Muscle aches

Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults.¹

It is possible that a new strain of the flu may present with additional or different signs and symptoms. If this happens DHSS will provide appropriate modifications.

Diagnosing the flu is done in the laboratory, not over the phone. The intention, at the PSAP level, is to identify the possibility of the flu and treat the patient and the responders accordingly. It is important to be able to differentiate between a patient who has just indications of the flu, a patient who has a serious medical condition with indications of the flu and a patient with life-threatening conditions and indications of the flu.

Initially the only impact this may have is informing the responders and hospital of the indication of flu and to take appropriate precautions. However, if the number of flu cases increases dramatically, it may

require a change in the types of resources we dispatch and where the patient is taken for treatment. Plans are being made to address this and will be implemented by DHSS when appropriate. If this happens the initial decisions will have to be based on the information the calltaker gets about the patient. To help it work the PSAP has to be able to identify the indications of the flu. The calltaker is not making a diagnosis, simply identifying signs and symptoms of the flu. With the traditional flu season approaching this is a good time to begin to develop this ability. Consider asking the caller if the indications for the flu exist even after you have identified the chief complaint. A person experiencing respiratory distress could have been presenting flu indications prior to the onset of their current complaint. The same can be true for a person with chest pains or a decreased level of consciousness. The flu is usually not fatal by itself. It weakens the body allowing other conditions to worsen. Getting into the habit of identifying flu indications along with immediate life-threatening conditions will help prepare for the possibility of a major outbreak. Some recommendations call for PSAPs to provide patient information to a designated agency to track the appearance and progression of the flu. While a few PSAP are participating in such a project, there are no plans for it to be implemented statewide. The State of New Jersey is currently using its existing hospital reporting system as well as the statewide EMS reporting system for this purpose.

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