



DISCOVERY HEALTH ALERT 2018 Influenza Season

The 2018 “A” Fishing Season is just beginning as is the annual influenza outbreak. Discovery Health has recently received requests for medical advice for potential influenza affecting mariners at sea. Due to the risks associated with influenza, we applaud vessels that have taken the preventative steps of vaccinating their crew and carrying the vaccine onboard.

Given the characteristics of this season's flu strain, the CDC is recommending, in addition to the flu vaccine for prevention, increased use of Tamiflu (oseltamivir). Oseltamivir is now available in a generic formulation which can be obtained at lower cost. Treatment works best when started within 2 days of onset of flu symptoms which include:

- Fever over 100.4 F (38 C)
- Aching muscles, especially in your back, arms and legs
- Chills and sweats
- Headache
- Dry, persistent cough
- Fatigue and weakness
- Nasal congestion
- Sore throat

High-risk crew include the following:

- Those 65 years and older
- American Indians/Alaska Natives
- Women who are pregnant or within 2 weeks of giving birth
- People with suppressed immune systems
- Extremely obese people (body mass index of at least 40)

Treatment is also indicated when flu is suspected for crew with chronic lung (including asthma), heart (except hypertension alone), kidney, liver, sickle cell disease, and diabetes.

Flu symptoms overlap with the common cold viruses making recognition difficult. In our experience as emergency physicians, we'd often ask if the patient felt like “they had been hit by a train,” meaning profound body aches and fatigue. If these symptoms are present, there is a high likelihood they suggest the flu. As we are not able to do testing on vessels, the suspicion of flu should prompt contact for medical advice to help determine next steps. As always, monitoring the crew member for symptoms of pneumonia which can mimic or evolve from flu is critical. Listening to the lungs for abnormal breath sounds, measuring the respiratory rate (above 20 is abnormal), pulse (above 100 is abnormal) and obtaining a pulse oximetry reading (below 92% is abnormal) are all factors that should be recorded in the medical log and reported to the Discovery Health medical consultant.

Discovery Health Physicians are available 24.7 at seadoc@discoveryhealthmd.com and 855-677-1111. Please see our web site at www.discoveryhealthmd.com