



Clinical Update

For Telephone Triage Nurses

February 2008

Page 1 of 2

In this Issue:

- American Heart Month
- Heart Attack Symptoms
- Influenza Activity February 2008
- Inhaled Exubera for Diabetes

Key Point: While chest pain is the most common symptom of a heart attack, somewhere between one quarter and one third of all heart attack patients do not experience chest pain.

Dear Nursing Colleague:

Since 1963, Congress has designated February as **American Heart Month**.

What are the Warning Signs of Heart Attack that everyone should know? Here is how the American Heart Association describes them:

Sign

- ◆ *"Chest discomfort. Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back. The discomfort can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.*
- ◆ *Discomfort in other areas of the upper body. Can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, the neck, jaw, or stomach.*
- ◆ *Shortness of breath. Often comes along with chest discomfort. But it also can occur before chest discomfort.*
- ◆ *Other symptoms. May include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness."*¹

Some Notes for the Triage Nurse

This is the most common symptom of a heart attack. However, approximately 27% of men and 37% of women can experience a heart attack and have no chest pain.

Take a look at the SHOULDER PAIN, NECK PAIN, and ABDOMINAL PAIN – UPPER guidelines. Note that there are heart attack—relevant triage questions.

Patients with new onset or worsening shortness of breath require more urgent evaluation.

Be especially suspicious in a patient with risk factors who has unexplained nausea and sweating.

Unfortunately, many people in your community will not recognize a heart attack when it happens. A recent telephone survey of over 70,000 people revealed that while 92% knew that chest pain was a symptom of a heart attack, only 31% were aware of all of the heart attack symptoms. Approximately 27% of the population knew all of the heart attack symptoms and knew that the correct thing to do was to call EMS 911. African-Americans, Hispanics, men, and persons with a lower level of education were significantly less likely to be aware of heart attack warning signs and symptoms and less likely to call 9-1-1.²

Thanks for being there and guiding callers to the safest decision.

Regards,

David Thompson, MD, FACEP

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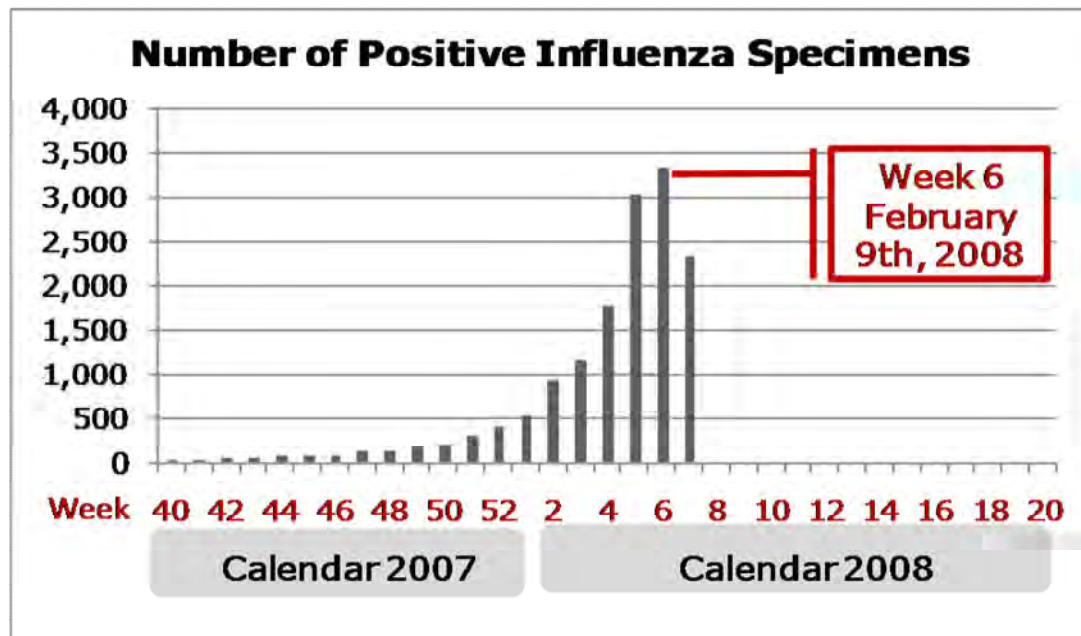
Page 2 of 2

February 2008



Influenza Activity — February 2008

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported increasing influenza during January and February 2008. The CDC reports that 5.9% of influenza viral isolates are resistant to oseltamivir (Tamiflu).³



Paralleling this activity, most call centers have been swamped with calls about influenza and other viral respiratory illnesses. This is a good time to review the background information in the adult and pediatric INFLUENZA guidelines.

Exubera - Inhaled Form of Insulin - No Longer Available

- ◆ Exubera was the first-ever inhaled insulin. It is delivered via a dry powder inhaler.
- ◆ It was approved by the FDA in January 2006 for the treatment of type 1 and type 2 diabetes mellitus.
- ◆ On October 18th 2007, Pfizer announced that they would no longer be making Exubera. More information is available on their website: <http://www.exubera.com>.

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Key Point: As is common at this time of year, influenza cases have surged. This upsurge typically rises and then subsides over an 8-12 week period.

References

1. American Heart Association. <http://www.americanheart.org>
2. CDC. Disparities in Adult Awareness of Heart Attack Signs. MMWR. February 22nd, 2008;57:175-179.
3. CDC. Update: Influenza Activity in the United States. 2008. MMWR. February 22nd, 2008;57:179-183.

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