UNDIAGNOSED RESPIRATORY ILLNESS - USA: (TEXAS)
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The investigation into a mysterious illness in Montgomery County is expanding, as other hospitals and doctors report similar cases. The new case files are being reviewed for similarity to the 8 at Conroe Regional Medical Center that prompted a Montgomery County Health Department investigation.

Four of those 8 patients died, and 2 are still fighting for their lives. "We don't currently have a diagnosis for what has caused those illnesses," Montgomery County medical director Dr Mark Escott said.

State and regional health departments have already been notified and are also looking for reports of new cases. "Other health departments will need to be looking for cases like this to make sure that we haven't missed cases," Dr Escott said.

Technically, the illness is classified as an influenza-like illness or ILI. There have been nearly 2000 ILI cases in Montgomery County this year [2013], but these 8 are different. "[There have been] 8 serious cases at a local hospital that developed with influenza-like symptoms that developed serious complications, including death for 4 of those 8 patients," said Dr Escott. At least some of these patients, all between the ages of 41 and 65, developed pneumonia. They all tested negative for standard strains of [seasonal] flu, and that is part of the problem. "The big worry about a situation like this is, 'Could this be a novel flu of some sort?"' Escott explained. "It could certainly be lots of other viruses or other diseases, but that is the big concern."

A 50 year old woman died last week at a hospital in North Harris County. She was perfectly healthy until she came down with flu-like symptoms about 3 weeks ago and ended up in the ICU.

The health department in Montgomery County is urging everyone to do their part to prevent any illness from spreading: Wash hands frequently; cover your cough but don't cough into your hands; stay home if you're sick; and get to the doctor within the 1st 48 hours of illness.

[byline: Jeremy Desel]

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Local and state medical officials are investigating an illness that has claimed the lives of 4 people in Montgomery County and hospitalized 4 more. The Montgomery County Public Health District was alerted of 8 cases at Conroe Regional Medical Center due to the severity of the cases. Of the 8 reported, 4 patients have died.

According to information from the Montgomery County Public Health District, officials learned of the cases within the last few weeks.

All 4 deaths have been males ages 41-68, said Jennifer L Nichols-Contella, public information officer/administrative coordinator with the Montgomery County Hospital District and Public Health District. In a press release from the Health District, officials state no diagnosis has been made.

"Those affected are experiencing flu-like symptoms but have tested negative for common flu strains," the release states. "The patients are currently housed at an area hospital awaiting further laboratory test results in an effort to determine the nature of the illness. Montgomery County Public Health District officials are monitoring the situation closely and will provide more information as it arises."

Nichols-Contella said there was little additional information about the patients including whether there was any connection in the deaths, whether they had been vaccinated for the flu, and whether autopsies would be performed. She added no other hospitals in Montgomery County have reported similar illnesses or deaths.

Health officials, according to Nichols-Contella, are not calling the illness an epidemic. Lindsay Duncan, spokesperson for Conroe Regional Medical Center (CRMC), confirmed the patients were at CRMC. "Conroe Regional Medical Center recently had 8 patients who presented to the hospital with similar flu-like symptoms," she said. "Initial rapid screening tests of these patients were negative for the flu; however, more definitive test results are pending. We are working closely with the Texas Department of State Health Services."

An official with the Texas Department of State Health Services said her office has been contacted by Montgomery County health officials. "We are aware of the illnesses and deaths in Montgomery County and have requested specimens be sent to our state lab for testing."

[byline: Catherine Domingez]
Four of 8 patients admitted recently to Montgomery County hospitals have died of a mysterious flu-like illness, officials said. The patients, ranging in age from 41 to 68, were admitted to the hospital with flu symptoms, but tests for influenza were negative, said Jennifer Nichols-Contella, spokeswoman for the Montgomery County Public Health District. "We're monitoring the situation and waiting on further lab results," Nichols-Contella said Tuesday [17 Dec 2013]. No details were available Tuesday on the dates of the deaths or hospitalizations, she said.

Although the Montgomery County patients did not test positive for influenza, this is the heart of the US flu season, which typically peaks in January or February, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). During the week ending 7 Dec 2013, 4 states -- Texas, Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi -- reported high levels of influenza-like illness, CDC reported. The levels of activity are based upon the percentage of outpatient doctor visits that are due to influenza-like illness, according to the CDC website.

Flu symptoms can include some or all of these conditions: fever or feeling feverish; chills; cough; sore throat; runny or stuffy nose; muscle or body aches; headaches; fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, although this is more common in children than adults.

None of the above press reports provides sufficient information to identify the cause of this localised outbreak and its severity.

Initial tests have not identified a cause, and [seasonal?] influenza appears to have been excluded, although the specific nature of the tests are not revealed. There are many respiratory viruses,
other than influenza virus, associated with high mortality. An avian influenza might be a candidate, but at this stage, it cannot be assumed that the infection is viral. Further information is awaited. - Mod.CP

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<http://healthmap.org/r/2Jna>.}