

Influenza Epidemic Alert

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For the first time in history, public health workers in this country are in the position of being ahead of an impending major epidemic, caused by a new variant of A-type influenza virus.

The cooperation of many groups has both forewarned us and given us the means to curtail the extent of the epidemic. We must take steps immediately if we are to make effective use of the means at hand.

Inoculation with a vaccine containing the newly discovered Asian strain influenza virus is the only preventive we have available. Six major pharmaceutical companies have been licensed by the Public Health Service to manufacture influenza vaccine, and all six companies report that they are working at an accelerated production schedule to produce at least 60 million cubic centimeters by February 1, 1958, enough vaccine to provide protection for one-third of the population.

Our job as public health workers is to encourage the use of every bit of the vaccine just as soon as it becomes available. It is expected that plans for purchase and distribution of vaccine will be worked out jointly in local communities by health departments, private physicians, hospitals, and other interested groups. Meanwhile, plans for meeting an epidemic situation nationally have been worked out cooperatively by the

Public Health Service, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers, the American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association, the American Public Health Association, and various professional groups and voluntary health agencies.

National, State, and local joint planning is necessary not only to insure the widest possible use of available vaccine, but also to prepare for the probability that influenza in epidemic proportions will affect those who are unable to obtain vaccine or who do not avail themselves of it. It is conceivable that 20 percent of the population of an area may be stricken with influenza. This could cause serious disruption in industry, government, education, and essential services. Such circumstances would, of course, severely strain medical personnel and care facilities.

Thus public health, together with other professions in the health and allied fields, faces a unique challenge. The traditional tasks of surveillance, reporting, laboratory services, and the like must go on at an accelerated pace. At the same time, a tremendous job must be done in public information and education with respect to use of the vaccine. Finally, public health agencies have to plan and prepare for the emergency services that will be needed if and when an epidemic strikes.