

Influenza Continues to Wane, but Not Death Toll

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Influenza activity continues to decline in the United States even as the death toll, which lags behind the infection rate, continues to rise, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said today.

Through the third week of 2013, ending on January 19, the percentage of deaths attributed to influenza and pneumonia in 122 benchmark cities rose to 9.8% from 8.3% the week before, according to the CDC's latest report on the 2012-2013 influenza season. The epidemic threshold for such deaths is 7.3%. Likewise, the number of hospitalizations associated with laboratory-confirmed influenza rose from 18.8 per 100,000 population in the second week of 2013 to 22.2 in the third week (both figures are cumulative through the entire influenza season).

Both mortality and hospitalization rates have been steadily climbing in January, whereas indicators of influenza activity have tailed off. The percentage of respiratory specimens that test positive for influenza shrank for 2 weeks straight, going from 29.4% in week 2 of 2013 to 26.1% in week 3. In addition, the percentage of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness (ILI) — defined as fever along with a cough or sore throat — decreased to 4.3%. This figure is still above the national baseline of 2.2%. The number of states reporting high levels of ILI fell to 26.

In a [January 18 telebriefing](#), CDC Director Thomas Frieden, MD, MPH, predicted that the rate of influenza-related hospitalizations and deaths would rise in the coming weeks despite a decline in overall influenza activity. Dr. Frieden attributed the seeming conflict to the time gap between when influenza first strikes and when the disease sends patients to the hospital, where some eventually die.

Table. Influenza Now Accounts for More Than 1 in 5 Hospitalizations

Characteristics of the 2012-2013 Influenza Season	Week 52, 2012 (ending December 29)	Week 1, 2013 (ending January 5)	Week 2, 2013 (ending January 12)	Week 3, 2013 (ending January 19)
Respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza	31.6%	32.8%	29.4%	26.1%
States reporting widespread influenza activity	41	47	48	47
Deaths attributed to influenza and pneumonia in 122 benchmark cities	7%	7.3%	8.3%	9.8%
Hospitalizations for influenza per 100,000 population (cumulative for influenza season)	8.1	13.3	18.8	22.2
Outpatient visits for ILI nationwide	5.6%	4.8%	4.6%	4.3%
States reporting high levels of ILI	29	24	30	26

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

More information on the latest developments in the 2012-2013 influenza season is available in [Flu View](#), a weekly surveillance report from the CDC.