

Improving Hawaii's influenza-like illness surveillance network with aloha



CONTRIBUTOR: *Rachel Takahashi, Hawai'i Department of Health, Disease Outbreak Control Division, Disease Investigation Branch*

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The Hawaii Department of Health visited U.S. Outpatient Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet) sentinel providers throughout the state. ILINet reporting increased almost three-fold from the previous season, leading to better information to help prevent potential outbreaks and improve patient care.

The “What”

U.S. Outpatient Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet) sentinel providers collect and report data on patients seeking care for respiratory illness. ILINet can capture patient visits due not only to influenza but also to other pathogens that cause similar symptoms, providing important situational awareness about the overall impact of circulating respiratory illness. These data support health departments as they monitor threats in their communities, and also contribute to national situational awareness.

The Hawaii Department of Health (HI DOH) was concerned about low reporting participation from their providers during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 influenza seasons, which reduced their ability to monitor influenza and other respiratory activities. The HI DOH ILINet team, which receives funding through the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for the Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) cooperative agreement, evaluated the surveillance program and decided to visit sentinel providers across the state who participate in the ILINet program. These visits included discussions about reporting methods, areas of improvement, reporting providers requests for resources, and the utility and positive impacts of reported ILLI data. HI DOH also analyzed geographic location of participating providers, identified under-represented parts of the state, and conducted outreach and recruitment visits to enroll more healthcare providers to the surveillance program. HI DOH acknowledged that with consistency and representativeness in reporting data, influenza and respiratory monitoring activities are more effective in preventing potential outbreaks and improving public health.



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The “So What”

HI DOH’s goal for the 2022-2023 season was to improve ILINet reporting including both the timeliness and representativeness of ILI data throughout Hawaii. Only 22% and 19% of the total enrolled sentinel providers actively reported data during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 seasons, respectively. In the 2022-2023 season, reporting increased to 72% of the total enrolled sentinel providers. This represents a **278% increase from the previous influenza season.**

When surveying sentinel providers about weekly ILINet reporting, one shared that, “I think for me, the more you remind me and, with a lot of communication..., it kept me engaged. I am so busy that if you don’t engage with me, I’m not going to do it. Email is best for me, but you can also call and visit.” Personal and constant engagement and support were key factors when working with sentinel providers to increase ILI reporting. HI DOH’s work has not only improved their own ability to detect and interrupt respiratory illness, but also strengthened relationships with clinical care providers and demonstrated the importance of robust engagement between public health and clinical healthcare.



The “Now What”

HI DOH’s ILINet team would like to continue to build on this project by improving interoperability and electronic data exchange amongst HI DOH, Hawaii’s State Laboratory Division (SLD), and sentinel providers. By encouraging more sentinel providers to submit specimen samples to SLD for further sub-type testing via the Electronic Test Orders and Results program, HI DOH can obtain and utilize test results more rapidly, which further improves their ability to detect and interrupt potential outbreaks.

Key contributors to this project include Caroline Pratt, Myra Ching-lee, and Michelle Vien, Hawaii Department of Health.