On April 1, 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported the first known human infections with a novel avian influenza A (H7N9) virus in China. As of May 2, 2013, a total of 128 cases have been reported, including 26 deaths. At this time, no cases have been detected outside of China.

While investigations are ongoing, there is currently no evidence that the virus has become easily transmissible from person to person. We continue to monitor the situation in China closely and will provide updates as new information becomes available.

Who should be considered a suspect case of avian influenza A (H7N9)?
A patient with influenza-like illness* (ILI) meeting either of the following exposure criteria:

- Recent travel (within ≤ 10 days of illness onset) to China; OR
- Recent contact (within ≤ 10 days of illness onset) with a confirmed or probable case of infection with novel influenza A (H7N9) virus.

*ILI is defined as fever (temperature of 100°F [37.8°C] or greater) and cough and/or sore throat.

Infection control precautions for suspect, probable or confirmed cases:
CDC has issued interim guidance for influenza A (H7N9) infection control precautions, which are available at: http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h7n9-infection-control.htm

Clinicians must notify the Santa Barbara County Disease Control Program of any suspect novel influenza cases, including H7N9. Please call (805) 681-5280 on a 24/7 basis to report suspect cases. For more information on reporting of communicable diseases or electronic reporting via the CalREDIE Provider Portal, please visit our website at www.sbcphd.org/dcp

Summary of Recent Influenza Activity in Santa Barbara County

The 2012-2013 influenza surveillance season began on 9/30/12 (week 40).

Summary of recent influenza activity: The five reporting Sentinel Provider sites reported influenza-like illness (ILI) in 2 of all the patients seen week 13 (2/438; 0.46%), a decrease from week prior (see chart on next page). The local hospital labs have reported having tested 45 patients with rapid tests with 4 testing positive (8.89%; 2 flu A, 2 flu B) in week 13 which is a decrease from prior week. Hospital Emergency Departments saw a total of 2472 patients that week, 196 (7.93%) with ILI and 2 admitted.

Since the season began, a total of 96 clinical specimens have submitted to the Public Health Lab from hospital laboratories for PCR testing, 40 tested positive (41.67%; 39 flu A; 1 flu B). There have been six flu-related deaths reported. The ages at death were 60, 78, 84, 85, 93 and 96; five females and one male. There have been 6 upper respiratory infection (URI) clusters reported in county Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNF), 5 of which have been confirmed to be influenza and those are considered flu “outbreaks.”
Health Care Reform and the Public Health Department

The Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act was signed into law in March of 2010. Major new provisions become effective January 1, 2014 that will likely change health care for many in our community.

It is estimated that there will be 25,000 residents in Santa Barbara County who will be eligible for an expanded Medi-Cal program. Another 50,000 residents will be eligible for health care coverage through the Health Benefits Exchange, called Covered California. Overall, the number of uninsured in our county is expected to decrease from 67,000 to 27,000. Individuals who will remain uninsured include people who prefer to pay a penalty, those who reside outside of the tax system, those who do not enroll, and the undocumented.

How will Santa Barbara County prepare for these changes?

The Public Health Department is partnering with the county Alcohol Drug and Mental Health Services and Social Services departments to plan for:

- Application and enrollment of newly eligible Medi-Cal patients
- Provision of mental health services (which are on parity with physical health services)
- Education of staff and patients about the Affordable Care Act
- Adequate providers to meet increased demand
- Individuals who are still uncovered

It is beneficial for all individuals and organizations to learn more about the law, its impacts and opportunities. Expect to hear more about this in the coming months.