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September 22, 2015

To: All professionals in the EMS System for Metropolitan Oklahoma City and Tulsa

From: Jeffrey M. Goodloe, MD, NRP, FACEP
Medical Director, Medical Control Board

Re: Influenza 2015-2016

As most of you know, I detest memos for their highly impersonal and usually bureaucratic tone. That being said, your health, the health of your families, and the health of our patients is always in prevailing importance to me. In service to those priorities, please read on.

As much concern as EMS professionals and citizens alike have had in the past year regarding the Ebola Virus Disease, please remember that influenza, a disease that has afflicted humans for centuries now, has already claimed far more lives than Ebola most likely ever will. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), influenza was linked to over 17,911 hospitalizations in patients of all ages and to 141 pediatric deaths in the US alone in the 2014-15 flu season. The 2014-15 flu season was generally regarded as a "moderately severe" one. Widespread vaccination will help us all experience a less severe season this year.

This memo then serves three purposes:

1. My reminder to you to take all the good information about personal protective equipment (PPE) that we collectively shared regarding Ebola and to apply similar good infection control practices when working with patients that have suspected influenza.
2. My plea to you to get an influenza vaccination as soon as possible. Yes, I will receive mine in the next 1-2 weeks and have voluntarily received an annual influenza vaccination for the last 20 years. Hillcrest Medical Center in Tulsa joined a growing number of medical facilities in the last two years in requiring its health care professionals to receive a seasonal influenza vaccination to continue working (unless medically contraindicated due to personal allergies, etc). Remember that when you voluntarily receive vaccination, you protect you, you protect your families, you protect your colleagues, and you protect your patients and your communities. While I can't, and wouldn't, require you to get immunized against influenza to remain credentialed as an EMS professional in our EMS system, I do pass along my strong encouragement for influenza vaccination.
3. My authorization for Protocol 17J: Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Administration to become effective immediately for the 2015-16 flu season.

Thank you as always for your efforts in service to others and for your ongoing dedication to excellence in the practice of EMS medicine.