

UW-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health: Flu surveillance continues with \$2.4 million CDC award

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MADISON- A researcher has received a \$2.4 million award from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to continue his work that has found flu activity in schools is a good warning system for flu activity in the community.

Dr. Jon Temte, professor of family medicine and community health at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, has been tracking flu-like illnesses in the Oregon School District for three years as part of the Oregon School District Child Absenteeism Due to Respiratory Diseases Study (ORCHARDS). When parents call to report a student absence, they get a recording with a phone number to call. Screeners talk with the parent and then make home visits when it's determined if the student may have flu. Research teams go to the home to collect nose and throat specimens. One is used for a rapid flu test and the other is sent to the State Laboratory of Hygiene for molecular testing that can identify 17 respiratory viruses.

In the last three years, Temte found that Oregon students were absent for more

than 4,200 days and research staff made more than 700 home visits.

“We found that widespread flu activity in the community shows up one to two weeks after the flu appears in school children,” said Temte. “The children take the flu home to their parents, siblings and grandparents and it spreads in the community.”

Researchers found a high correlation between school absences for influenza-like illnesses and positive flu cases reported by clinics.

In ORCHARDS II, Temte and his team will investigate how virus transmission occurs within households by focusing on the role school children play in introducing acute respiratory viruses to the family. ORCHARDS II will continue to provide an early warning system for seasonal influenza in the Oregon School District and contribute to a growing body of national and international flu research.

“One of the major components of a national plan for seasonal and pandemic influenza planning is early recognition,” said Temte. “With advanced warning and early implementation of public health measures, the effects of flu can be significantly reduced.”

According to the CDC, between 12,000 and 56,000 people died each year from the flu from 2010-2014. Last year, 4,000 Wisconsinites were hospitalized with influenza.