

Tracking flu's LI path

■ Northwell uses high-tech tie-in to hospitals' data

■ 'Dashboard' is a tool to predict facilities' needs

BY DELTHIA RICKS
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Data analysts and doctors at Northwell Health have created what they call a "flu dashboard" — a high-tech method of tracking people with influenza admitted to the system's hospitals or treated in its emergency rooms.

The method provides flu data within Northwell system's 17 hospitals on Long Island, in New York City and in Westchester County, which can help determine how to allocate treatment resources, administrators said. It captures the number of patients who have tested positive for the flu, as well as patients' ages, gender and ZIP codes.

The new dashboard, announced Tuesday at a news briefing, is the brainchild of analysts at the health care giant's Krasnoff Quality Management Institute who worked in collaboration with the health system's public health emergency experts and emergency department doctors. "We all know it's a bad flu season this year. Children and the elderly are the most vulnerable," said Stanley



Anthony DeGeorge, left, coordinator of Northwell's emergency management team, with nurse Eddie Reyes.

Cho, an epidemiologist and senior research analyst at the Krasnoff Institute, one of the tracking system's lead developers.

He collaborated with Mark Swensen, emergency management coordinator at Northwell Health and his team, as well as with Dr. Salvatore Pardo, vice chairman of emergency medicine at North Shore Uni-

versity Hospital in Manhasset.

As flu mounts on Long Island and beyond, methods of tracking become increasingly important, especially in light of an epidemic that has yet to trend downward, doctors and virus-hunters Islandwide said.

The dashboard is based on viral tracking methods developed by the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention and the New York City Department of Health, Cho said. He said the system allows Northwell to "pinpoint exactly which hospitals are experiencing high rates of flu-like illness."

Knowing that, he added, allows the health care system to allocate masks, the antiviral medication Tamiflu, intra-

venous bags and other flu-fighting resources to those facilities.

A map of the Island, reminiscent of the state Health Department's Flu Activity Map of New York, was displayed in large scale at the briefing. Northwell flu-emergency experts can see a similar depiction on their computer screens and know where the respiratory illness is most prevalent, based on diagnoses at Northwell facilities.

Within the past week, the 12 Northwell hospitals that have been fully integrated into the system have seen more than 10,500 patients with flu-like symptoms. About 2,700 were hospitalized, Northwell officials said.

Swensen said the data collection is so swift — and accurate — that he and his colleagues ultimately hope to use it to notify school districts that are in an area of high flu activity.

The CDC assesses flu activity across the nation, and the state Department of Health collects data in New York from county health agencies, which track flu incidence in their jurisdictions.

In addition, Nassau University Medical Center for years has served as a hub of respiratory viral-tracking on the Island, identifying respiratory illnesses of all kinds that are actively spreading. In recent weeks, doctors in both Nassau and Suffolk counties have said the proliferation of influenza has kept them busy.

'Quick hit of snow' in morning, but then rain



Vincent Ducharme checks winterberry bushes at his Cutchogue nursery.

BY PATRICIA KITCHEN
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Precipitation enters the picture again Wednesday morning, expected to start as snow and sleet on Long Island, forecasters say.

But by noon, it should switch to rain as temperatures rise.

Early morning commuters could be spared, but those getting a later start could see a snow-sleet mix begin possibly around 9 a.m. in Nassau and 10 a.m. or so in Suffolk, said Jay Engle, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Upton, based on the late afternoon Tuesday forecast.

It will be "a quick hit of snow" turning into "a rain event," he said, with generally less than an inch of accumulation for most of the Island, though northwestern Nassau could see an inch.

New York City is under a winter weather advisory, with 1 to 2 inches forecast.

Precipitation is expected to wrap up from west to east later Wednesday evening, the weather service said.

Drier air will arrive overnight Wednesday into Thursday, which is looking to be mostly sunny, warming up to only around 30 degrees.

FORECAST

WEDNESDAY
HIGHS 40 to 43°
Cloudy, wintry mix

OVERNIGHT
LOWS 27 to 29°
Cloudy, rain decreasing

THURSDAY
HI 32° LOW 20°
Mostly sunny and colder

FRIDAY
HI 34° LOW 29°
Mostly cloudy skies

SATURDAY
HI 43° LOW 36°
Chance of rain and snow