
Address for correspondence: Cornelia Adlhoch, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Surveillance and Response Support Unit, Tomtebodavägen 11 A, SE-171 83 Stockholm, Sweden; email: cornelia.adlhoch@ecdc.europa.eu

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Evaluation of 3 Electronic Methods Used to Detect Influenza Diagnoses during 2009 Pandemic

To the Editor: Conducting influenza surveillance in hospitals is imperative to detect outbreaks, inform infection control policy, and allocate resources (1). Hospital administrative data could be harnessed for this purpose (2,3) but are not currently used for infection surveillance because of data lag times. Influenza cases could be identified by using International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-10-CM), codes within the discharge abstract, pharmacy, and microbiology laboratory information systems. Although these approaches are assumed to accurately identify influenza cases, this assumption has not been widely tested, especially during a pandemic. In this retrospective cohort study, we aimed to identify and evaluate 3 electronic methods of influenza case detection during 1 peak of influenza A(H1N1)pdm09.

With ethics board approval, we used the Ottawa Hospital Data Warehouse (OHDW) (Ottawa, ON, Canada) to identify 398 adult inpatients at the Ottawa Hospital during October–December 2009 who had cardiac, infectious, or respiratory disease diagnoses (ICD-10-CM codes: all J codes, A15–19, A37, A40, A41, A49, I26, I28, I50, I51.4, R57). OHDW contains administrative data could be harnessed for this purpose (2,3) but are not currently used for infection surveillance because of data lag times. Influenza cases could be identified by using International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-10-CM), codes within the discharge abstract, pharmacy, and microbiology laboratory information systems. Although these approaches are assumed to accurately identify influenza cases, this assumption has not been widely tested, especially during a pandemic. In this retrospective cohort study, we aimed to identify and evaluate 3 electronic methods of influenza case detection during 1 peak of influenza A(H1N1)pdm09.

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infectious respiratory symptoms being written before confirmatory testing (4). Influenza classification by positive laboratory tests was specific but less sensitive in this analysis, probably because of nonuniform laboratory testing among inpatients from lack of specific criteria to guide testing and lack of testing in those with less severe illness. Not all patients who have influenza are tested for it, and these diagnoses would be classed as false negatives, influencing the sensitivity downward. Furthermore, laboratory testing would be likely to miss patients with influenza-triggered exacerbations of congestive heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (5), which would underestimate influenza cases.

Our study correlated ICD-10-CM–specific codes for influenza in hospitalized adults during 1 peak of the 2009 influenza pandemic. A previous study in the United States in 2006 evaluated ICD-9-CM admission and discharge influenza codes in hospitalized children (6). The authors found that of 715 laboratory-confirmed influenza cases, ICD-9-CM codes were only 65% sensitive, suggesting that use of these codes for surveillance would underestimate influenza hospitalizations by 35% (6). This work was undertaken in 3 consecutive non-pandemic influenza seasons during 2001–2004.

Our findings must be generalized with caution because our study evaluated ICD-10-CM coding accuracy over 3 months of a pandemic influenza season in adults at 1 academic hospital. With lower influenza prevalence, the PPV would drop, suggesting that the coded diagnosis would overestimate influenza hospitalizations. Furthermore, sensitivity and specificity of codes might not be static measures because the diagnosis of influenza on the chart might be influenced by the prevalence of influenza in communities (7).

Given these limitations, further work is needed to fully validate ICD-10 codes for influenza during seasons of low prevalence and in other populations including children. Despite this, our results have implications for future research using administrative data to develop timely surveillance systems, track costs, and monitor resource use.

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Sunita Mulpuru,
Tiffany Smith,
Nadine Lawrence,
Kumanan Wilson,
and Alan J Forster

Author affiliations: University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada (S. Mulpuru, K. Wilson, A.J. Forster); Public Health Agency of Canada, Ottawa (T. Smith); and Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, Ottawa (N. Lawrence, K. Wilson, A.J. Forster)

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References


Address for correspondence: Sunita Mulpuru, 1053 Carling Ave, Box 684, Admin Services Bldg, 1st Floor, Room 1019, Ottawa, ON K1Y 4G9, Canada; email: sunitamulpuru@hotmail.com

Table. Performance characteristics of electronic influenza classification methods compared to criterion standard chart review, Ottawa Hospital, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, October–December 2009*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>TP</th>
<th>FP</th>
<th>TN</th>
<th>FN</th>
<th>Sensitivity</th>
<th>Specificity</th>
<th>PPV</th>
<th>NPV</th>
<th>PLR</th>
<th>NLR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DAD flu diagnosis</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive laboratory result</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(79.7–98.9)</td>
<td>(94–98.2)</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antiviral drug prescribed</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(66.5–89.4)</td>
<td>(95.9–99.2)</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*TP, true positive; FP, false positive; TN, true negative; FN, false negative; PPV, positive predictive value; NPV, negative predictive value; PLR, positive likelihood ratio; NLR, negative likelihood ratio; DAD Flu Diagnosis, International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Clinical Modification, diagnosis code for influenza on the discharge abstract database stored in the Ottawa Hospital Data Warehouse.