



News Release

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Flu-Related Hospitalizations Up Significantly Over Last Year; ODH Urges Ohioans to Get Influenza Vaccine

Dec. 7-13 is National Influenza Vaccination Week

COLUMBUS – Influenza-like illness is on the rise in Ohio, and the number of associated hospitalizations are significantly higher with 202 through Nov. 29 compared to 89 last year. There has been one confirmed influenza-associated pediatric death, a teenager from southern Ohio. The 2014-2015 flu season started in October and likely will continue into next spring.

“Influenza vaccination is the safest and most effective way to fight the flu, so I encourage all Ohioans who have not already done so to get vaccinated today, except infants younger than 6 months old,” said Dr. Mary DiOrio, medical director of the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). “With flu activity increasing and family and friends gathering for the holidays, now is a great time to get vaccinated to protect yourself and your loved ones.”

Symptoms of influenza can include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine each year. Flu vaccination is available at most healthcare providers’ offices, local health departments and retail pharmacies.

The 2014-2015 flu season may be severe, according to information released by CDC this week. Influenza A (H3N2) is the predominant virus strain this year, and hospitalizations and deaths are higher when it is dominant. In addition, the influenza vaccine that was prepared for this year’s flu season is poorly matched to half of H3N2 viruses circulating, reducing its effectiveness.

“It’s still important to get vaccinated,” said Dr. DiOrio. “The flu vaccine has been found to provide some protection against drifted viruses. It also offers protection against circulating influenza strains for which the vaccine remains well-matched, such as Influenza A (H1N1) and B viruses.”

CDC is recommending that clinicians administer one of two prescription antiviral drugs as a second line of defense as soon as possible to patients with confirmed or suspected influenza who are hospitalized, have severe illness, or may be at higher risk for flu complications. These antiviral drugs are oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®). Patients who could benefit from them include children younger than 2 years old; adults 65 and older; people with chronic medical conditions including asthma, heart disease, or weakened immune systems; pregnant women; American Indians/Alaska Natives; and people who are morbidly obese.

“These antiviral medications can reduce the severity of the flu and prevent serious flu complications,” said Dr. DiOrio. “They work best when started within two days of getting sick.”

While influenza-associated pediatric deaths must be reported to ODH, adult deaths are not reportable so total influenza-associated death statistics are not available.

More information about influenza and flu activity in Ohio is available at www.flu.ohio.gov.

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