



News Release

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Flu-Associated Hospitalizations Continue to Increase; **Third Pediatric Death in Two Weeks** *Flu Vaccine Still Widely Available Across Ohio*

COLUMBUS – Influenza vaccine is still available across Ohio as flu-like illness continues to increase and the number of associated hospitalizations remain high. During week five of this year’s flu season, there were 396 new confirmed-flu associated hospitalizations in Ohio compared to 395 the week before. There have been 2,075 total flu-associated hospitalizations since flu season began last October. During last year’s flu season, Ohio had 3,633 total flu-associated hospitalizations, and 9,374 two years ago.

Ohio also has its third confirmed influenza-associated pediatric death in the last two weeks. A 6-year-old boy from Columbiana County, a 7-year-old girl in Fulton County and a 6-year-old girl in Cuyahoga County. A total of 20 influenza-associated pediatric deaths have been reported this season nationwide. This is a reminder of the danger flu poses to children. During last year’s flu season, there was 1 flu-associated pediatric death, and 6 two years ago.

“Influenza vaccination is the safest and most effective way to prevent the flu, except for infants younger than 6-month old who aren’t eligible to receive it,” said Sietske de Fijter, chief of the Bureau of Infectious Diseases and state epidemiologist for the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). “There are no flu vaccine shortages across Ohio and it is available at most healthcare providers’ offices, local health departments and retail pharmacies.”

Flu season in Ohio generally lasts from October to May, and peaks around this time of year. The 2015-16 flu season a year ago did not peak until early March.

While vaccination provides the greatest protection against the flu, other effective ways to avoid getting or spreading it include: washing hands frequently or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer; covering coughs and sneezes with tissues, or coughing or sneezing into elbows; avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth; and staying home when sick and until fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication.

Symptoms of influenza can include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.

CDC recommends 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. 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,” de Fijter said. “They work best when started within two days of getting sick.”

Adult flu-associated deaths are not reportable to ODH so these statistics are not available.

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

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