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News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Flu-Related Hospitalizations Continue to Climb in Ohio

Providers Report Adequate Supplies of Influenza Vaccinations

COLUMBUS – Flu activity remains a concern across Ohio as well as across the country this winter. The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) reminds all Ohioans that it's not too late to get vaccinated against the flu.

Influenza data released today by ODH indicates that there have been 1,922 influenza-associated hospitalizations reported so far this flu season. That total number compares to 175 in the 2010-11 season and 86 in the 2011-12 season. In addition, one influenza-associated pediatric death has been recently reported. Last season, no pediatric deaths were reported, and one was reported in the 2010-11 season.

"Flu season got an early start in Ohio but it's not too late to get your flu vaccination," said Dr. Ted Wymyslo, Director of ODH. "We also want to help Ohioans understand more about the protection offered by the flu vaccine. There are a lot of myths out there, such as the misconception that the flu shot makes you sick."

Disease experts outline several reasons why people may commonly link the influenza vaccination to their illness:

- It takes about two weeks to build up immunity so you could catch a flu virus in the meantime.
- You could get a virus that is not in the flu vaccine although the strains we are seeing seem to be a good match for the vaccine. There are also many non-flu viruses circulating in Ohio this time of year including some that cause colds or stomach illnesses (like Norovirus).
- The vaccination doesn't give every person 100 percent immunity to those flu strains. Everyone's body is different. However, many times having a flu vaccination can reduce the severity of the flu and can also help curb the spread of flu from person to person.

"We're hearing from our local health departments and also private distributors that Ohio has an adequate supply of flu vaccine still available," said Wymyslo.

In addition to getting a flu vaccination, ODH and CDC offer the following tips to help you stay healthy this flu season:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based sanitizer when you are unable to wash.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread this way.
- If you get sick, stay home from work and keep sick children home from school or child care.
- Get plenty of rest. Sleep is shown to help your body fight off illness.

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- Keep your body healthy: eat a balanced diet including plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole grain products; drink plenty of water and go easy on salt, sugar, alcohol and saturated fat; and exercise regularly because 30 or more minutes of physical activity most days of the week can help boost your immunity.

Ohio's 2012-13 Flu Season Summary

- 10/10/12 ODH begins producing weekly influenza activity summaries and providing updates to local health departments.
- 11/26/12 ODH launches its TV public service announcement campaign. The television commercial encouraging flu vaccination will continue to air statewide through the end of January.
- 12/13/12 ODH Director communicates the need for everyone to get a flu shot in an agency-wide email, also making the video message available on the agency's YouTube channel.
- 1/8/13 ODH develops flu fact sheets for school administrators to distribute to staff, parents and students.
- 1/9/13 The ODH Immunization Advisory Committee discussed the current influenza season and advised there is no need for change in our current strategy for approaching influenza in Ohio.
- 1/10/13 Major pharmacies report to ODH that there is an adequate supply of anti-viral medication and vaccines available in the supply chain.

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ODH publishes weekly influenza activity summaries and other information that are available on their website, www.flu.ohio.gov.