



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 19, 2014

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Flu Widespread Across Ohio; Flu-Related Hospitalizations Increasing Rapidly

ODH Urges Flu Vaccination as Ohio Approaches Peak Flu Season

COLUMBUS – Influenza-like illness is now widespread throughout Ohio, and the numbers of associated hospitalizations are increasing rapidly. Last week alone (week 50), there were 529 new confirmed influenza-associated hospitalizations in Ohio, bringing the total to 985 since flu season began in October. Just two weeks ago, there were 202 total confirmed flu-associated hospitalizations. At this time during last year's flu season, there were 216.

Ohio also has its second confirmed influenza-associated pediatric death, a 16-year-old boy from Licking County. This is a reminder of the danger flu poses to children.

"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 Dr. Mary DiOrio, medical director of the Ohio Department of Health (ODH).

The 2014-2015 flu season, which likely will continue into next spring, may be severe according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Influenza A (H3N2) is the predominant virus strain this year, and hospitalizations and deaths are higher when it is dominant.

"Many people have probably heard about this year's flu vaccine not being as effective because of mutations in some influenza viruses," said Dr. DiOrio. "I cannot emphasize strongly enough that it's still very important to get vaccinated. The vaccine provides some protection against mutated viruses and maximum protection against other circulating influenza strains for which the vaccine remains well-matched."

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.

"These practices are especially important with flu activity increasing and family and friends gathering for the holidays," noted Dr. DiOrio.

Symptoms of influenza can include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Flu vaccination is available at most healthcare providers' offices, local health departments and retail pharmacies.

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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