

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.

**Rick Scott**

Governor

John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS

State Surgeon General & Secretary

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Dec. 03, 2013

MEDIA CONTACT: Marie Mott

desk 850-595-6272

HEALTH OFFICIALS ENCOURAGE PREGNANT WOMEN TO GET INFLUENZA VACCINE

PENSACOLA, FL – The Florida Department of Health in Escambia County (DOH-Escambia) reminds residents to protect themselves and their families from influenza (flu) infection. Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness and can sometimes lead to death. The flu season usually begins in early October and lasts until May, peaking in January and February in Escambia County, Florida. There has been a notable increase in the incidence of flu in Escambia County, Florida during the month of November, including an increase in the number of cases in pregnant women.

Everyone six months and older should get vaccinated, especially adults 65 and older, children 5 and younger, pregnant women and caregivers of infants under 6 months of age. It is also important for those with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart or lung disease to get vaccinated. Pregnant women are especially encouraged to get vaccinated. Pregnancy's effect on the immune system can cause a more severe infection leading to poor outcomes for both mother and baby.

Flu vaccine may be given as a shot or a nasal spray. The flu shot is approved for use in people 6 months of age and older, including people with chronic medical conditions and pregnant women. The nasal spray is approved for use in people 2 through 49 years of age who do not have underlying medical conditions and are not pregnant. Flu vaccines are available at many physicians' offices, clinics, and local pharmacies. The vaccine takes approximately two weeks to become fully effective.

Symptoms of the flu may include cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and fever. Some people may also experience diarrhea and vomiting. Health officials advise individuals who are at risk of complications from influenza to contact their physicians immediately if flu symptoms appear. Individuals should see a physician early, as antiviral medications may be effective in reducing the severity of symptoms or the length of the illness.

Individuals can protect themselves and their families from the flu by practicing preventive behaviors. While the best way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated every year, frequent hand washing is another important key to prevention. Other healthy behaviors such as avoiding close contact with those who are sick, getting plenty of sleep, being physically active and eating nutritious food can also help in preventing the flu.

Individuals can spread the flu to others before they even know they are sick. The most effective ways to avoid spreading the flu are by covering coughs and sneezes with the elbow rather than the hand and by staying home when sick.

Persons experiencing flu symptoms or having questions regarding the flu and their health should contact their physician's office. For more information about the flu, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>. Additional information can also be found at the Escambia County Health Department's website, <http://www.escambiahealth.com/>.

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Florida Department of Health

Escambia County
1295 West Fairfield Drive • Pensacola, FL 32501
PHONE: 850/595-6500

www.FloridasHealth.com

TWITTER:HealthyFLA
FACEBOOK:FLDepartmentofHealth
YOUTUBE: fldoh