

December 7, 2015

HEALTH OFFICIALS ENCOURAGE INFLUENZA VACCINE

National Influenza Vaccination Week is December 7-13, 2015



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Pensacola, Fla. – The Florida Department of Health in Escambia County (FDOH-Escambia) reminds residents to protect themselves and their families from influenza (flu). 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.

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. Others who should get vaccinated include caregivers of infants younger than 6 months, infants and children older than 6 months, and adults 65 and older. It is also important for those with chronic health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, and heart or lung disease, to get vaccinated.

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 physician 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 duration 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 to prevent getting 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. Local locations for receiving the flu vaccine can be found at www.flu.gov. 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 FDOH-Escambia's website, <http://www.escambiahealth.com/>.

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