



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

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## **Alabamians advised to be immunized for influenza and follow infection control practices**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Higher than normal levels of influenza activity are currently being reported in both Alabama and the U.S. Reports of influenza-like illness have been above Alabama's baseline for significant activity for seven consecutive weeks. More specimens have already been submitted this season than in the 2011-2012 season, which was considered mild.

Seasonal influenza is not a reportable disease, so the Alabama Department of Public Health cannot provide absolute numbers of influenza cases in Alabama. Two surveillance networks, ILINet and SpecINet, are used to obtain information on influenza activity, and participation in both is completely voluntary.

Rosemary Blackmon, executive vice president of the Alabama Hospital Association, said, "We have heard numerous stories of hospitals with high volumes of flu patients, both those treated in the emergency department and those who are being admitted. At this point, although many hospitals are full, they are able to effectively care for the patients they have and, to our knowledge, are not asking for additional resources. They are taking extra precautions by requesting visitors avoid coming to the hospital if they think they might be sick."

Flu is a very contagious respiratory illness, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention emphasizes that the best way to prevent it is to get vaccinated each year. CDC has also stated the vaccine is a good match to the circulating viruses. At this time, there are no vaccine shortages in the state and all county health departments have vaccine available.

Although influenza vaccination is recommended for all individuals 6 months and older, it is especially important to consider for the following people who are at higher risk of influenza-related complications:

- All children between 6 months and 5 years of age, but especially those between 6 months and 2 years of age
- Adults 50 years of age and older, especially those 65 years and older
- Adults and children with chronic disorders
- Pregnant women

- Children aged 6 months through 18 years on chronic aspirin therapy
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- Persons who are immunosuppressed
- Health care workers
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than age 5 and adults 50 years of age and older
- People who are morbidly obese (those with a body mass index, or BMI, of 40 or greater)

The public is also reminded of the importance of following basic infection control measures to help prevent the spread of the flu. These include covering the mouth and nose with a tissue or cloth when coughing and sneezing, washing hands frequently, and staying at home when sick.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said. "The CDC warns that even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. It's not too late to get a flu shot to protect against this serious disease. People become protected about two weeks after receiving the vaccine."

A person with the flu may have some or all of these symptoms: fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headache, muscle aches and often extreme fatigue. At present, there is no widespread shortage of antiviral medications (sold commercially as Tamiflu and Relenza) which may slow the spread of influenza. Should routine supplies and procurement options be exhausted, a cache of surge supplies and equipment is available.

Contact your private health care provider, pharmacy or your local county health department to receive an influenza vaccination. For more information contact the Immunization Division of the Alabama Department of Public Health at (334) 206-5023 or toll free at 800-469-4599.