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## **Kentucky Flu Activity Level is Widespread for 9<sup>th</sup> Consecutive Week** *Public Health Urges Vaccination for Kentuckians*

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (April 6, 2016)** — Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) officials are reporting “widespread” flu activity to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the ninth consecutive week. Widespread activity is the highest level of flu activity, which indicates increased flu-like activity or flu outbreaks in at least half of the regions in the state. The activity levels for states are tracked weekly as part of the CDC’s national flu surveillance system.

The traditional flu season lasts from October through May. Increased flu activity began later this season than usual in Kentucky. Due to the late peak in the season, both in Kentucky and nationally, increased flu activity is anticipated to continue well into May.

“Even though flu season is running later than usual, Kentuckians can still protect themselves and their families by getting a flu shot,” said Dr. Kraig Humbaugh, senior deputy commissioner of DPH. “The Kentucky Department for Public Health is urging anyone who hasn’t received a flu vaccine, particularly children 6 months and older and those people at high risk for complications related to the flu, to check with doctors’ offices, local health departments, pharmacies or other providers about getting the vaccine.”

The vaccination rate in Kentucky each flu season is about 50 percent. Therefore, there are many susceptible Kentuckians in the population. Flu can cycle within a community several times. Young children and those who are elderly or have chronic disease are especially vulnerable to more severe consequences. While this year’s vaccine was a good match to the viruses circulating nationally, its effectiveness can depend on the recipient’s age and their immune system, among other factors.

It takes about 2 weeks following the administration of the vaccine for the recipient to develop protection from the flu. There are ample supplies available throughout the state. Vaccinations are available at Kentucky’s local health departments, pharmacies and medical providers. Many health plans cover the cost of the vaccine with no copay. Kentuckians are advised to call before arriving for a vaccination.

Flu can be very contagious. Infection with the flu virus can cause fever, headache, cough, sore throat, runny nose, sneezing and body aches. Persons who develop flu symptoms should seek medical advice about the

need for a medical evaluation or treatment with an antiviral drug, which could shorten the course of the illness or reduce its severity.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers these tips to stop the spread of germs:

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medicine).
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.

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*The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.*