



## **Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Kentucky Flu Epidemic Influenza-related deaths reach 100**

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (Feb. 2, 2018)** – The Department for Public Health, within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), is reporting 100 flu-related deaths from the flu epidemic in Kentucky. At least four of those deaths have been pediatric cases. This season's H3N2 strain of the flu virus can be extremely serious, even deadly, not just for those in higher risk categories but to generally healthy Kentuckians as well.

Kentucky is in its seventh consecutive week of widespread flu activity which is the highest level of flu activity and indicates increased flu-like activity or flu outbreaks in at least half of the regions in the state. The flu season runs through late May. During the 2016-17 flu season, Kentucky recorded 76 deaths.

“Tragically, the influenza virus has claimed the lives of 100 Kentuckians so far this season,” said Dr. Jeffrey D. Howard, Acting Department for Public Health Commissioner. “During this time of widespread flu activity, we want to remind people to avoid contact with others if you have influenza or an influenza-like illness. If you are

sick, seek care from your healthcare provider early. Lastly, take appropriate measures to protect yourself such as washing your hands with soap and water.”

The most common flu type identified in Kentucky at this time is influenza A. A healthy person with influenza also will usually miss three to five days of work, school, or other usual activities, and sometimes may miss seven to 10 days.

“Pneumonia, bacterial bloodstream infections, and sepsis are examples of serious influenza-related complications that may require hospitalization and sometimes result in death of healthy people with no known risk factors for serious illness,” added Department for Public Health’s State Epidemiologist, Dr. Jonathan Ballard. “Flu vaccination is the most effective protection against flu. We especially recommend that all healthy Kentuckians aged six months and older be vaccinated. The flu season typically runs until late spring so it is not too late to get vaccinated.”

It takes about two 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.

The flu can be highly contagious and cause potentially life-threatening disease. Infection with the flu virus can cause fever, headache, cough, sore throat, runny nose, sneezing and body aches. Individuals who develop flu symptoms should seek medical advice to determine if they should be treated with an antiviral drug, which could shorten the course of the illness or reduce its severity.

“Recently the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) issued a health advisory recommending antiviral treatment to all hospitalized and high-risk persons with suspected influenza and that benefits of antiviral medications are observed even when treatment is initiated beyond two days of illness onset,” concluded Dr. Ballard.

Influenza virus can also directly infect the heart and can cause severe and potentially fatal acute changes in the heart’s rhythm and function.

Those same serious and potentially fatal complications can also occur in people at high risk for developing influenza related complications. Persons at high-risk include children younger than five years (but especially children younger than two years), adults aged 65 years and older, pregnant women (and women up to two weeks postpartum), residents of nursing homes and other longer term facilities, and persons with chronic illnesses (e.g., asthma and chronic respiratory illnesses, neurological or neurodevelopmental conditions, heart disease, blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease), diabetes, kidney and liver disorders, weakened immune system due to disease like cancer or medications, persons younger than 19 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and people with extreme obesity (body mass index of 40 or more).

DPH officials report weekly to the CDC national flu surveillance system. The weekly report is now available online at <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/epi/Influenza.htm> and is updated each Friday before noon.

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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.