



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**National Influenza Vaccination Week: December 2-8,
2018**

Get vaccinated to help prevent spread of flu

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Dec. 3, 2018) - The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH), within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, encourages Kentuckians to get a flu shot during National Influenza Vaccination Week, Dec. 2-8, to help prevent the spread of flu this holiday season.

"The flu vaccine is the single best way to protect you and your loved ones against the flu," said Jeff Howard, M.D., commissioner of DPH. "If you are vaccinated, you are less likely to get the flu and spread the flu to those at greatest risk for becoming dangerously ill, including young children, pregnant women, people 65 and older and those with certain medical conditions. By getting vaccinated you are protecting your family and those people you cross paths with every day."

DPH officials report weekly to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of statewide flu surveillance efforts. Kentucky currently is reporting 118 laboratory-confirmed cases of flu with the state flu activity level currently classified as "regional".

The weekly report is now available online at

<https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dph/dehp/idb/Pages/influenza.aspx> and will be updated each Friday before noon.

Flu is a serious upper respiratory illness that can lead to prolonged illness and absenteeism from school or work; inpatient and outpatient medical care including visits to the emergency room or hospitalizations; and, in severe cases, death.

Christa Mitchell, who lives in central Kentucky, got the flu the day after Christmas last year. “I almost died and it all started with the flu,” said Christa. “I developed complications and was told that I was probably going to lose all of my toes, if not more, and at least all the fingers on my left hand.”

Christa spent 49 days in the hospital. Her road to recovery has included surgeries to remove and repair parts of her hands and feet. She continues an aggressive re-hab and wound care regiment today, along with multiple doctors’ appointments.

“I’ve always been healthy and have never been prone to being sick. I didn’t get my flu shot,” continued Christa. “My advice is simple: get your flu shot. Had I gotten a flu shot and then came down with the flu it would not have been as serious. As it turns out I have to deal with the impact of the flu for the rest of my life.”

CHFS produced a video story about Christa. It’s available on the Cabinet’s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/kychfs/>. Additionally, unedited video of an interview with Christa and several family members, along with b-roll elements of Christa at home and photos of the family before and after the flu is now available for unrestricted media use at the CHFS MediaLink channel on

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC99OwJNHHYu9ve13279wllg>. Media members can freely use any of the material on our Medialink site for use in their own stories.

According to information provided by the CHFS Office of Health Data and Analytics, expenditures for Medicaid beneficiaries for flu-related healthcare services totaled \$4.4 million during a three-month timespan from October to December of 2017. This includes

hospitalizations related to flu as well as associated emergency room visits and inpatient services associated with each case.

National Influenza Vaccination Week is a weeklong observance that serves as a reminder to those people who have not yet received a flu vaccine that the time to get vaccinated continues into winter – through February or later, when flu season typically peaks. Because it takes about two weeks for the body to develop protective antibodies against the flu following vaccination, Kentuckians who have not had a chance to be vaccinated should seek out the opportunity now. Vaccine supplies are considered plentiful at this time, but people are urged to call their providers or pharmacies to check on availability.

Throughout the week, the CDC and DPH will highlight the importance of vaccinations for those people at high risk, their close contacts and all those who want to be protected against the flu. In addition, good health habits such as washing hands often with soap and warm water, avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth, and staying at home from work or school when sick will also be emphasized.

The CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends flu vaccine for all individuals six months of age and older. People who are strongly encouraged to receive the flu vaccine because they may be at higher risk for complications or negative consequences include:

- Children age six months through 59 months; • Women who are or will be pregnant during the influenza season; • Persons 50 years of age or older;
- Persons with extreme obesity (Body Mass Index of 40 or greater); • Persons aged six months and older with chronic health problems; • Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities; • Household contacts (including children) and caregivers of children aged ≤ 59 months (i.e., aged <five years, particularly contacts of children aged <five years, particularly contacts of children aged <six months) and adults aged ≥ 50 years;
- Household contacts and caregivers or people who live with a person at high-risk for complications from the flu; and

- Health care workers, including physicians, nurses, and other workers in inpatient and outpatient-care settings, medical emergency-response workers (e.g., paramedics and emergency medical technicians), employees of nursing home and long-term care facilities who have contact with patients or residents, and students in these professions who will have contact with patients.

Dr. Howard added, “You should also follow the advice your parents gave you to prevent flu and other illnesses that tend to circulate at this time of year – wash your hands frequently, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze and stay home when you’re sick.”

Adequate supplies of flu vaccine are expected to be available for this year’s season. Vaccination can be given any time during the flu season.

Infection with the flu virus can cause fever, headache, cough, sore throat, runny nose, sneezing and body aches. Flu can be very contagious. For more information on influenza or the availability of flu vaccine, Kentuckians should contact their primary care medical professional, local health department or local pharmacy. Influenza information is also available online at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>.

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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, the Department for Aging and Independent Living 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.