



Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

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Kentucky Reports its First Pediatric Deaths for the Season as Flu Activity Remains Widespread *Public Health Urges Vaccinations for Kentuckians*

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Jan. 12, 2018) - The Department for Public Health, within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), reports the state's first pediatric deaths for the 2017-18 flu season.

"Of the thirty-six flu-related deaths reported so far this season, two of those were children," said the Acting Department for Public Health Commissioner Dr. Jeffrey D. Howard. "The average age of death of the other thirty-four people who died as a result of flu is 75 years of age," continued Dr. Howard. To protect the family's privacy, the children's hometown, county and gender are not being released.

"We extend our deepest sympathies to the families. These personal losses are a reminder for all of us that flu can be a serious illness, for young and old alike. We strongly encourage people to protect themselves, particularly children 6 months and older and those people at high risk for complications related to the flu. Stay at home if they have the flu or flu-like symptoms and to avoid contact with others."

The 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 to determine if they should be treated with an antiviral drug, which could shorten the course of the illness or reduce its severity.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 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 hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.

DPH is reporting “widespread” flu activity for the fourth consecutive week this flu season. 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 most common flu strain identified in Kentucky and in the 36 deaths is Influenza A, added Department for Public Health’s State Epidemiologist, Dr. Jonathan Ballard. “Flu vaccination is the most effective protection against flu,” Dr. Ballard reports. “Recently the CDC issued a health advisory advising clinicians that antiviral treatment that all hospitalized and high-risk persons with suspected influenza should be treated with antiviral medications, and that benefits are observed even when treatment is initiated beyond 2 days of illness onset. The flu season typically runs until late spring so it is not too late to get vaccinated.”

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.

Another result of the harsh flu season is the number of influenza outbreaks in Kentucky’s long-term care facilities. There has already been 49 outbreaks reported this season. The traditional flu season lasts from October through May.

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.

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.