



Eastern Highlands Health District

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Eastern Highlands Health District Encourages Residents to Prepare For Flu Season

Shots (also called vaccinations or immunizations) play a huge role in keeping our community healthy. This August the Eastern Highlands Health District (EHHD) is proudly participating in National Immunization Awareness Month by encouraging all adults and their children to get the recommended seasonal and age specific vaccinations. Vaccinations are a safe and effective action you can take to prevent diseases that could result in serious health problems.

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is an extremely contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Director of Health at EHHD, Rob Miller, comments that "we're encouraging all of our residents and their children to stay up-to-date with their vaccinations because staying healthy is a priority for all of us. One of our main concerns in the fall and winter months is the flu. The flu virus causes prolonged unpleasant symptoms such as body aches, fatigue and cough which can lead to several missed days of work or a spoiled holiday season. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated each year."

While it's not possible to predict the magnitude of this year's flu season, we do know that most seasonal flu activity typically occurs between October and May, with December through February being peak flu season months. The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get an annual flu vaccine. It's best to get the vaccine before the flu season begins in October; however, as long as flu viruses are circulating in the community, it's not too late to get vaccinated.¹

Some people, such as young children, people with certain medical conditions, the elderly and pregnant women, are at high risk for flu complications. Encouraging your loved ones who fall into these high risk categories to get the flu shot is important for their overall health and safety. If someone you know is at high risk for flu complications and displays symptoms of the virus they should get a medical evaluation as soon as possible.

Children 6 months of age and younger are too young to get the flu vaccine, but should be protected from any contact from someone with the flu. Taking preventative actions such as staying away from sick people, washing your hands and staying home from work or school if you have the flu will help keep your family and community healthy and safe.²



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EHHD suggests following these simple steps, recommended by the CDC, to protect yourself and your loved ones:

Step 1: Talk with a healthcare professional about which vaccines are right for you.

Your doctor or other healthcare professional can advise you on which vaccines you need and why – as well as which vaccines may not be right for you based on certain factors such as allergies to vaccine ingredients or health conditions.

Step 2: Get vaccinated.

Most health insurance plans cover the cost of recommended adult vaccines. Check with your insurance provider for details of coverage including where you can get vaccinated. Flu vaccines are offered by many doctors' offices, health departments, pharmacies and college health offices. Sign up for EHHD's hot topic list serv at www.ehhd.org to get notified when a flu clinic will be offered in your town.

Step 3: Encourage your friends and loved ones to get vaccinated.

All adults need immunizations to help them prevent getting and spreading serious diseases. After getting your vaccinations, talk to your friends and loved ones about getting protected too!

As parents start enrolling their children and teenagers in school and students begin returning to college campuses, it is a good time to focus community attention on the value and necessity of immunization.³

For more information on immunization across an individual's lifespan, please visit EHHD's website at www.ehhd.org/immunization. To receive monthly hot topic updates from EHHD, including when a flu clinic will be happening in your town, please sign up through EHHD's QNotify at www.ehhd.org. For more information or resources, such as immunization awareness materials to hand out to employees at your business or organization, please contact Ana Zeller at zeller@ehhd.org.

^{1, 2, 3} Sources for this press release include cdc.gov, vaccines.gov and webmd.com.



Influenza Season, Update for Week 46* (Week ending Saturday, 11/21/2015)

Key Points

- ✓ Overall activity remains low and is currently classified geographically as sporadic**.
- ✓ The predominant influenza viruses identified this season are Type A, although the percentage of Type B influenza viruses in circulation has recently increased.
- ✓ One influenza-associated death has been reported.
- ✓ It is time to obtain your flu vaccine and take other steps to prevent influenza-related illness and hospitalization: <http://www.ct.gov/dph/cwp/view.asp?a=3115&q=500340>

The Department of Public Health (DPH) uses multiple surveillance systems to monitor circulating flu viruses throughout the year. All data are considered preliminary and updated with available information each week starting in October and ending in May.

- Statewide emergency department visits attributed to the “fever/flu syndrome” have remained at a level between 4.0-4.9%, which is below the level of 5% statewide; generally considered the minimum threshold when there are elevated influenza-associated ED visits (Figure 1).
- The percentage of outpatient visits with influenza-like illness (ILI) had been gradually increasing for several weeks, but has recently decreased below a level of 1% statewide; generally considered the baseline when there are increased influenza-associated visits in the outpatient setting (Figure 2).
- The percentage of unscheduled hospital admissions due to pneumonia has been gradually increasing but remains below a level of 4% statewide; generally considered the baseline when there may be increased pneumonia hospitalizations due to influenza (Figure 3).
- A total of 33 hospitalized patients with laboratory-confirmed influenza have been reported. Of these reports, 24 were Type A (subtype unspecified), 1 was Type A (H3N2), 1 was Type A (2009 H1N1), and 7 were influenza B virus. One influenza-associated death in an individual greater than 65 years of age has been reported to date, this season (Figures 4 & 5).
- A total of 66 positive influenza reports have been reported for the current season. Influenza was reported in seven of eight Connecticut counties: Fairfield (23 reports), New Haven (16), Hartford (13), New London (6), Middlesex (3), Litchfield (3), and Windham (2). Of the 66 positive influenza reports: 44 were Type A (subtype unspecified), 4 were Type A (H3N2), 2 were Type A (2009 H1N1), and 16 were influenza B virus (Figures 6 & 7).

* Week numbers refer to the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* calendar used by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for national disease surveillance.

** Definitions for the estimated levels of geographic spread of influenza activity available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/overview.htm>