

**Protect yourself and your loved ones from influenza this holiday season; Get a flu shot**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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The holidays are a hectic time, so don't let the flu slow you or your loved ones down. It's not too late to get a flu shot. According to the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December is not too late to vaccinate.

"This season, share the gift of health—not the flu," said Winkler Sims, director of the health department's Immunization Division. "The flu is far more dangerous than a bad cold. It is a disease of the lungs and it can lead to pneumonia, hospitalization and even death. Talk to your health care provider now about scheduling your flu shot."

More people die from complications of the flu than from any other vaccine-preventable disease. Most deaths are in those over 65 years of age. The flu shot will not give one the flu, because flu vaccines are made from killed influenza viruses.

People in good health still need flu shots to protect themselves and others with whom they live and have contact. Alabama's peak influenza season usually does not begin until January and it continues through March. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for a person to develop protective antibodies.

Even though the use of influenza vaccine has increased in Alabama as well as the United States in recent years, immunization rates for influenza remain low, and illness and death from the disease remain high. On average, 20,000 people die each year in the United States from complications associated with influenza.

County health departments in Alabama will continue administering influenza vaccine in clinics through the end of influenza season while supplies last. A schedule of influenza clinics can be accessed on the Alabama Department of Public Health Web site at [www.adph.org/immunization](http://www.adph.org/immunization). For more information about influenza, contact your local county health department or personal physician.

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