

Alabama to receive limited supply of additional influenza vaccine

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The demand for influenza vaccine this season has exceeded the supply available for the 2003-2004 flu season. Presently, there is no vaccine available at county health departments. Today the federal government announced that Alabama will receive an additional 1,400 doses of the vaccine that will be distributed through public health areas in the state. Some individual county health departments may, however, not receive additional vaccine.

More than 200,000 flu shots have been administered in the state this season.

"The Alabama Department of Public Health ordered a larger quantity of vaccine for this season than ever before, and is pleased the public has responded by getting their immunizations earlier," said Winkler Sims, director of the Immunization Division. "We regret there are not enough doses for everyone who wishes to receive them."

Influenza cases usually peak in January or February in Alabama, as they do nationally. In addition to being immunized, the public is advised to wash their hands frequently. Parents should not send their children to school with a fever, and to wait until a child is free of fever for 24 hours before sending him or her to back to school.

Those groups at highest risk of complications of influenza include persons 50 years old or older; residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities that house persons of any age who have long-term illnesses; adults and children who have chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma; adults and children who need regular medical care or have been in a hospital because of diseases like diabetes, chronic kidney disease, or weakened immune system; women who will be more than 3 months pregnant during the flu season, children 6-23 months of age and household contacts of high risk people.

Influenza is caused by a virus. In an average year, 20 percent of the population experiences influenza. Symptoms include the sudden onset of fever, cough, headache, body aches, mild sore throat and stuffy nose. Severe symptoms last 2-7 days, but the cough can last for weeks. Some patients become so sick that they need hospitalization and some even die.

For more information about the availability of influenza vaccine, contact your health care provider or county health department.

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