



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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**Protect yourself and your loved ones from influenza for the new year; get a flu shot**

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alabamians who did not receive an influenza shot this fall are advised that an influenza immunization can still help protect them during peak flu season.

Influenza activity is on the rise in Alabama and is considered significant. Influenza-like illnesses represented almost 11 percent of physician office visits among reporting physician practices during the week of Dec. 12-18. During the previous week, only about 6 percent of visits were for influenza-like illnesses.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "Influenza is a disease of the lungs and it can lead to pneumonia, hospitalization and even death. Talk to your healthcare provider now about scheduling your flu shot as soon as possible. There is an ample supply of vaccine this year."

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. There are two kinds of flu vaccine, but neither will give a person the flu. The flu shot vaccine is made from killed influenza viruses, and the nasal spray vaccine is made from weakened influenza viruses that cannot cause influenza.

Influenza vaccine can be administered to children as young as 6 months of age. 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.

Approximately 35 provider offices statewide report the percentage of patients seen with influenza-like illness to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's U.S. Outpatient Influenza-Like Illness Surveillance Network each week.

Results from influenza testing performed at the Alabama Department of Public Health Bureau of Clinical Laboratories over the past two weeks indicate there are three strains of influenza circulating in Alabama: type A (2009H1N1), type A (H3) and type B. Of the specimens submitted, 92 percent are influenza type B. All three of these strains are in this season's influenza vaccine.

In addition, everyone should take steps to prevent transmission of disease and are reminded to follow these precautions:

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a sleeve or tissue.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.
- Avoid touching your mouth, eyes and nose with your hands. Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, stay home and limit contact with others to avoid infecting them.

County health departments in Alabama will continue administering influenza vaccine in clinics through the end of influenza season while supplies last. For more information about influenza shots, contact your local county health department or personal physician.