



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama experiences significant influenza activity early in flu season

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Like many states in the nation, higher than normal levels of influenza activity are currently being reported in Alabama. Influenza-like illness has been above Alabama's threshold for significant activity for seven consecutive weeks.

Of the 100 samples tested for the week ending Jan. 5, 53 percent were positive for influenza. Forty-six samples were positive for influenza A, H3; 2 were positive for influenza A, 2009 H1; and 5 were positive for influenza B. Although there are no quantifiable numbers at this point, hospital leaders across the state say they are seeing a significant number of flu patients.

Flu is a very contagious respiratory illness, and the CDC emphasizes that the best way to prevent it is to get vaccinated each year. Influenza vaccination is especially recommended for the following people who are at higher risk of influenza-related complications.

- All children between 6 months and 5 years of age, but especially those between 6 months and 2 years of age
- Adults 50 years of age and older, especially those 65 years and older
- Adults and children with chronic disorders
- Pregnant women
- Children aged 6 months through 18 years on chronic aspirin therapy
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- Persons who are immunosuppressed
- Health care workers
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than age 5 and adults 50 years of age and older
- People who are morbidly obese (those with a body mass index, or BMI, of 40 or greater)

Anyone else who wishes to reduce the chance of contracting influenza should get a flu shot. A person with the flu may have some or all of these symptoms: fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headache, muscle aches and often extreme fatigue.

The public is also reminded of the importance of following basic infection control measures to help prevent the spread of the flu. These include covering the mouth and nose with a tissue or cloth when coughing and sneezing, washing hands frequently, and staying at home when sick.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said. "The CDC warns that even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. It's not too late to get a flu shot to protect against this serious disease. People become protected about two weeks after receiving the vaccine."

At present, there is no widespread shortage of antiviral medications which may slow the spread of influenza, (sold commercially as Tamiflu and Relenza). Charles Thomas, state pharmacy director said, "While there are isolated seasonal shortages due to increased ordering during this time and the lag in restocking by wholesalers, there is no reason to believe that there is any significant long-lasting shortage at this time."

Contact your private provider, pharmacy or your local county health department to receive an influenza vaccination. There is no shortage of vaccine available this season. For more information contact the Immunization Division of the Alabama Department of Public Health at (334) 206-5023 or toll free at 800-469-4599.