

First Pediatric Flu Death Reported in Ohio

New flu-associated hospitalizations rise sharply in Ohio, across U.S.

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) is reporting the state's first pediatric flu death of the 2017-18 flu season, a 4-year-old boy from Montgomery County. ODH also is reporting 1,750 new confirmed flu-associated hospitalizations in Ohio during the first week of January, a significant increase over 925 reported during the last week of December. There have been 3,854 total flu-associated hospitalizations in Ohio since flu season began last October.

The 2017-18 flu season in Ohio and nationally is looking similar to what was seen during the 2014-15 flu season which at the time was the most severe flu season in recent years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CDC says that flu activity in the U.S. increased sharply during the first week of January, and is now categorized as widespread in 46 states. Flu activity traditionally begins to increase in October and can last as late as May, with cases typically peaking between December and February.

"Flu is difficult to predict," said ODH Medical Director Dr. Clint Koenig. "It's not possible to say precisely when this flu season will peak or end or how severe it will be. That's why getting the flu vaccination is the safest and most effective way to prevent the flu for everyone 6 months and older. Flu vaccination also can reduce the severity of illness if you do get sick."

Flu vaccination prevents millions of illnesses and tens of thousands of flu-related hospitalizations each year. While the flu vaccine can vary in how well it works, people who still get sick may have milder symptoms.

So far, influenza A (H3N2) viruses have been the most common flu viruses circulating this season, according to CDC. H3N2-predominant flu seasons have been associated with more severe illness, especially among children and adults age 65 and older. Vaccine effectiveness against H3N2 viruses has been around 30 percent. Vaccine effectiveness against other circulating flu viruses has been about 60 percent for H1N1 viruses, and around 50 percent for influenza B viruses. A study also done on flu vaccination said that it can significantly reduce a child's risk of dying from influenza.

Symptoms of flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Flu vaccination is available at most healthcare providers' offices, local health departments and retail pharmacies. There are no flu vaccine shortages across Ohio.

Other effective ways to avoid getting or spreading the flu include: washing hands frequently or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer; covering coughs and sneezes with tissues, or coughing or sneezing into elbows; avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth; and staying home when sick.

CDC recommends that healthcare providers prescribe one of two antiviral drugs as a second line of defense as soon as possible to patients with confirmed or suspected influenza who are hospitalized, have severe illness, or may be at higher risk for flu complications.

"These antiviral medications can reduce the severity of the flu and prevent serious flu complications," Koenig said. "They work best when started within two days of getting sick."

More information about influenza and flu activity in Ohio is available at www.flu.ohio.gov.

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