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First Pediatric Flu Death of Season Reported in Ohio

Flu Activity now “Widespread” Across the State

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) is reporting the state’s first flu-associated pediatric death of the 2019-20 flu season, a 16-year-old girl from Cuyahoga County. The Cuyahoga County Board of Health is investigating the death.

In week 52 of the flu season, which ended Dec. 28, there were 387 new influenza-associated hospitalizations reported. There have been 1,003 flu-associated hospitalizations reported in Ohio so far this flu season compared with 555 reported during the same time period last year. Flu activity typically peaks between December and February.

“Getting the flu vaccine is the safest and most effective way to prevent the flu for everyone 6 months and older,” said Dr. Mark Hurst, Medical Director at ODH. “Flu hospitalizations could still be on the rise. You need to protect yourself, your friends and your family and get a flu shot now if you haven’t already.”

The flu vaccine can vary in how well it works, but people who still get sick despite having received the flu vaccine may have milder symptoms. 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.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend 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,” Dr. Hurst said. “They work best when started within two days of getting sick.”

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.

“If you are sick with the flu, stay home. Start the new year off right by helping to protect others when you are not feeling well,” Dr. Hurst said.

The number of flu-associated hospitalizations reported in Ohio this flu season is tracking below the five-year average.

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

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