



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: ODH Office of Communications (614) 644-8562

Spread the Joy this Holiday Season – Not the Flu

Geographic Spread of Flu Activity Elevated to “Regional”

COLUMBUS – With the holiday season and the start of the new year just around the corner, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) recommends that all Ohioans 6 months and older get a flu shot now. Flu activity began in October, but this is the time of year when there is an increase in cases.

Through week 49 of the flu season, which ended Dec. 7, there have been 262 influenza-associated hospitalizations reported in Ohio, compared with 198 reported during the same time period last year. ODH has also increased the flu activity level to “regional,” which means just under half of the state is seeing flu activity.

“It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies that protect against flu to fully develop in the body,” said ODH Director Amy Acton, MD, MPH. “With friends and family starting to gather for the holiday season, it is the perfect time to make sure you and your loved ones are protected against the virus.”

Getting vaccinated is especially important for people who are more vulnerable to serious flu complications, including older adults, young children, pregnant women, and people with long-term health conditions. Symptoms of influenza can include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Many people in vulnerable groups are also visited by friends and relatives. When their visitors are immunized, that also make them less likely to spread the flu to them.

“U.S. flu activity is elevated and increasing,” Dr. Acton said. “If you get sick with the flu, stay home to prevent spreading it to others.”

In addition to getting a flu shot, ODH offers the following tips to help you stay healthy this flu season:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based sanitizer when you are unable to wash.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread this way.
- Get plenty of rest. Sleep is shown to help your body fight off illness.
- When you are sick, stay home until you are fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication.

Flu vaccines are offered by many doctor’s offices, clinics, health departments, pharmacies, and college health centers, as well as by many employers and some schools.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that health care providers administer prescription antiviral medication as a second line of defense as soon as possible to patients with confirmed or suspected flu who are hospitalized, have severe illness, or may be at higher risk for flu complications.

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

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