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City of Milwaukee Health Department Reports Increase in Flu-Related Hospitalizations

Health officials urge vaccination and prevention steps to reduce spread

MILWAUKEE – As flu activity continues to increase statewide, the City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) is reminding all city residents that it's not too late to get the flu vaccine. Cases of influenza have been confirmed statewide, now hospitalizing more than 100 individuals in the city of Milwaukee alone.

“This is the time of year when we typically gather with family and friends, and the last thing you want to bring with you is the flu,” said Mayor Tom Barrett. “If you have not already received your flu vaccine, I urge everyone over 6 months of age to visit their doctor, clinic, or pharmacy to get vaccinated today. Even if you are healthy and can beat the flu, you will be protecting those around you by getting vaccinated.”

Influenza (the flu) is among the most common respiratory illnesses in the United States, infecting millions of people each year. The virus is spread through the air when someone who is sick coughs, sneezes, or speaks. Symptoms of seasonal flu include fever, cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, and fatigue. Though common, the flu can be serious, leading to hospitalization and sometimes death in the most vulnerable populations, including infants and young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and those with chronic illnesses.

“This year, we have seen flu-related hospitalizations in Milwaukee increase significantly since the Thanksgiving holiday, with most hospitalizations occurring in individuals ages 50 and older,” said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker. “The single best way to protect yourself and your family is to get the flu vaccine. Although the current strain circulating is slightly different from that included in the vaccine, the seasonal vaccine is still the best protection you can have and can reduce the severity of symptoms if you do get sick.”

The flu vaccine is recommended for all individuals over 6 months of age. Those especially at risk for complications from the flu include people with certain medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes and lung disease, as well as the elderly, pregnant women and young children.

Along with vaccination, antiviral medications can be highly effective in reducing the severity and duration of illness in individuals at risk for complications associated with the flu, as well as for those with persistent or severe symptoms.

The MHD encourages frequent hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes with your elbow to reduce the spread of the flu, as well as other viruses that circulated during the winter months. Those experiencing symptoms should remain home from work or school, get rest, drink plenty of fluids, and take antivirals if recommended.

Flu vaccine remains available through local health care providers and retail pharmacies, though area residents are advised to call ahead to determine availability. Individuals looking for a location to receive vaccine near their home can use the flu vaccine finder at www.milwaukee.gov/health.

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