



News for Immediate Release

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Department of Health Reports Significant Increase in Flu Activity Statewide

Harrisburg – The Department of Health today reported there has been a significant rise in influenza activity across Pennsylvania since Thanksgiving.

The Department of Health is reporting flu activity has increased from sporadic to widespread throughout the state meaning at least half of the state's regions are experiencing outbreaks of influenza or increases in influenza-like illness. The flu made an appearance earlier this year than in most flu seasons, as widespread activity is usually not seen until January. The number of cases reported to the department more than doubled in the past week.

"If you decided to wait, now is the perfect time to get vaccinated against the flu," Acting Secretary of Health Michael Wolf said. "Ensuring that you and your family get vaccinated will reduce the chance that your holiday plans will be affected from the flu."

The flu strains causing illness in Pennsylvania appear to be well matched to this year's vaccine. The Department of Health recommends the flu vaccine for everyone over the age of 6 months. But the vaccine is especially important for the elderly, pregnant women, and people with chronic health conditions that place them at increased risk of complications from the flu.

It takes 10 to 14 days to obtain the full protective benefit from the flu vaccine.

Most illness being seen in Pennsylvania is due to type A influenza H3N2; the type of flu most often linked to more severe flu seasons. This form of the flu can also be treated with antiviral drugs, especially when recognized early.

Now that the flu is here, in addition to getting vaccinated, everyone should take common sense precautions to keep it from spreading to others. These include:

- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Stay at home when ill.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Alcohol based hand sanitizers can also be used when soap and water are not handy.
- Clean and disinfect high use surfaces, especially if someone has been coughing or sneezing in the area.

"We want everyone to have a safe and healthy holiday season," added Wolf.

For more information on seasonal influenza, contact your local health care provider or visit www.health.state.pa.us.

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