



Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

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Kentucky Reports Flu Activity Now Epidemic

Facebook LIVE Public Event Planned to Discuss the Flu

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Jan. 24, 2018) - The Department for Public Health, within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), now describes influenza activity in Kentucky as an epidemic. This season's strain of the flu virus can be extremely serious, even deadly, not just for those in higher risk categories but to generally healthy Kentuckians as well. Kentucky is in its sixth consecutive week of widespread flu activity which is the highest level of flu activity and indicates increased flu-like activity or flu outbreaks in at least half of the regions in the state.

"Widespread influenza activity means that Kentuckians are likely to encounter one or more persons shedding influenza virus at work, at school, while shopping, while traveling, at athletic or entertainment events, and in places of worship," said the Acting Department for Public Health Commissioner Dr. Jeffrey D. Howard. "A person who will develop influenza illness actually can transmit the virus to other persons beginning one day before their illness begins."

The most common flu type identified in Kentucky and in 78% of the 65 influenza-associated deaths this season is influenza A. Of the deaths so far, 7% have occurred in previously healthy individuals with no reported risk factors for severe illness. Healthy persons with influenza also will usually miss three to five days of work, school, or other usual activities, and sometimes may miss seven to 10 days.

“Pneumonia, bacterial bloodstream infections, and sepsis are examples of serious influenza-related complications that may require hospitalization and sometimes result in death of healthy people with no known risk factors for serious illness,” added Department for Public Health’s State Epidemiologist, Dr. Jonathan Ballard. “Flu vaccination is the most effective protection against flu. We especially recommend that all healthy Kentuckians aged six months and older be vaccinated. The flu season typically runs until late spring so it is not too late to get vaccinated.”

It takes about 2 weeks following the administration of the vaccine for the recipient to develop protection from the flu. There are ample supplies available throughout the state. Vaccinations are available at Kentucky’s local health departments, pharmacies, and medical providers. Many health plans cover the cost of the vaccine with no copay.

Health officials invite the public to participate in a Facebook Live discussion about the flu on the CHFS Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/kychfs/> Thursday night at 6 p.m. eastern, 5 p.m. central. You can submit flu questions beforehand to: chfs.communications@ky.gov or post your question in the comments section during the event.

The flu can be highly contagious and cause potentially life-threatening disease. Infection with the flu virus can cause fever, headache, cough, sore throat, runny nose, sneezing and body aches. Persons who develop flu symptoms should seek medical advice to determine if they should be treated with an antiviral drug, which could shorten the course of the illness or reduce its severity.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers these tips to stop the spread of germs:

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medicine).
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.

“Recently the CDC issued a health advisory recommending antiviral treatment to all hospitalized and high-risk persons with suspected influenza and that benefits of antiviral medications are observed even when treatment is initiated beyond two days of illness onset,” concluded Dr. Ballard.

Influenza virus can also directly infect the heart and can cause severe and potentially fatal acute changes in the heart’s rhythm and function.

Those same serious and potentially fatal complications can also occur in people at high risk for developing influenza related complications. Persons at high-risk include children younger than five years (but especially children younger than two years), adults aged 65 years and older, pregnant women (and women up to two weeks postpartum), residents of nursing homes and other longer term facilities, and persons with chronic illnesses (e.g., asthma and chronic respiratory illnesses, neurological or neurodevelopmental conditions, heart disease, blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease), diabetes, kidney

and liver disorders, weakened immune system due to disease like cancer or medications, persons younger than 19 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and people with extreme obesity (body mass index of 40 or more)

DPH officials report weekly to the CDC national flu surveillance system. The weekly report is now available online at <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/epi/Influenza.htm> and is updated each Friday before noon.

MEDIA NOTE: An extended interview with Dr. Howard is available on the CHFS MediaLink channel on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/LG00TmrwKSE>. Feel free to use any of Dr. Howard's comments in stories you produce on this topic. Also, please subscribe to our MediaLink service:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC99OwJNHHYu9ve13279wllg> so you will be notified when CHFS posts new video elements from various health stories we produce. We do not want a courtesy or attribution for the information—we hope you use some of the information in the health stories you produce.

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services, the Department for Public Health, and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.