

OSDH Reports an Increase in Flu Cases; Vaccinations Encouraged

As the number of flu-related hospitalizations continues to increase, the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) reminds Oklahomans there is still time to get a flu shot.

OSDH reports a total of 22 deaths and more than 1,000 hospitalizations associated with the flu since the season began in September. More than half of the hospitalizations have occurred among individuals 50 years and older.

Public health influenza vaccination clinics are available at county health departments, medical providers and pharmacies throughout the state. The OSDH wants to remind Oklahomans that everyone is at risk for influenza and the flu vaccination is recommended for anyone 6 months of age and older.

Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk for serious illness from the flu including pregnant women, children younger than 5 years of age and people with asthma, diabetes, chronic heart and lung disease and other chronic conditions. Parents and family members of babies younger than 6 months of age and people who live with or care for anyone at high risk for complications from the flu, including health care workers, should also get the vaccine.

Symptoms of the flu include cough, fever, chills, headache, body aches and fatigue.

It is important for those experiencing flu-like symptoms to consult with a healthcare provider as soon as possible. A provider may prescribe antiviral drugs to treat the flu. These drugs work better for treatment when started within 48 hours of noticing symptoms. Antiviral drugs may also be indicated as a prevention measure for especially vulnerable persons who have been in close contact with someone sick with the flu, infants less than 6 months old, adults 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, or anyone with a medical condition which severely suppresses their immune system.

In addition to getting a flu shot, public health officials recommend the following prevention tips:

- Frequent hand washing using soap and water, or alcohol-based products such as hand gels when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Make respiratory hygiene a habit, using tissues to cover coughs and sneezes, then disposing of them and washing hands at once. When tissues are not readily available, cough into your sleeve, never your hands
- Stay home from work, school and other public places, except to get medical care or other necessities, until you have gone at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

Visit the OK Flu View at <http://flu.health.ok.gov> for weekly Oklahoma flu updates and additional information about the flu. Media inquiries should contact Jamie Dukes at [\(405\) 271-5601](tel:405-271-5601) or JamieD@health.ok.gov.