


DPH Announces First Flu Death of 2017-2018 Season

DOVER – The Division of Public Health (DPH) is reporting  the first flu-related death of the 2017-2018 flu season. The individual, a 47-year-old male from New Castle County, passed away last week at a local hospital. The man, who was infected with influenza A, was a resident of a long-term care facility and had multiple underlying health conditions.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with the gentleman’s family during this difficult time,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “His death is a reminder of how serious the flu can be, especially among vulnerable populations. We often think of the very young and seniors when we think of the vulnerable, but people at any age with underlying health conditions are also at a greater risk of the flu and serious complications stemming from it.”

As of Dec. 2, 2017, there are 46 laboratory-confirmed flu cases in Delaware for the 2017-2018 season with 15 requiring hospitalization. For the same time frame last flu season, there were 42 lab-confirmed cases statewide and also 15 hospitalizations.

Concerns have been expressed that the U.S. could see a difficult flu season, because this year’s flu season in Australia – which is typically a good measuring stick for how the season will unfold in the United States – has been particularly harsh, with more cases, hospitalizations and deaths compared with the season last year. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) flu experts say that flu is difficult to predict, and it’s still too early in our season to determine when the flu season will peak in the United States, how severe it will be, or what viruses will predominate.

Public Health officials say this is why getting the flu vaccine is so important. "Getting your annual flu vaccine is still your first and best line of defense against the influenza virus," said Dr. Rattay.

In addition to getting vaccinated the following additional preventive steps are critically important to stopping the spread of flu:

- **At this time of the year, it's important to keep your distance from others if you have cold or flu-like symptoms.**
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Cover sneezes and coughs with a tissue, and dispose of tissues immediately; if no tissue is available sneeze or cough into your inner elbow.
- Stay home if you are sick until you are fever free for 24 hours – with a temperature of less than 100° F (37.8° C), without the use of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours.
- If you suspect you have influenza, call your doctor as they may decide to provide antiviral medications to help hasten recovery and prevent serious complications

DPH continues to offer the vaccine at five State Service Centers. Information for these sites can be found at <http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/fluclinics.html>. You can also Google "CDC Flu Finder" and enter your ZIP code. Additionally, the vaccine is available through many medical providers, pharmacies, and some grocery stores.

DPH recommends anyone, 6 months of age and older, who has not yet been vaccinated against the flu, to do so as soon as possible as it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body that protect against influenza virus infection. Children 6 months to 8 years getting vaccinated for the first time, should get two doses of

vaccine.

For more information on influenza prevention, diagnosis, and treatment, call DPH at 1-800-282-8672 or visit flu.delaware.gov.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.