

Flu is Now Confirmed Statewide; DPH Announces First Flu Cases in Kent and Sussex Counties for the 2019-2020 Season

DOVER – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is reporting the state's first laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza in Kent and Sussex counties, for the 2019-2020 flu season. The Kent County case involves a 26-year-old female, while the Sussex County case involves a 7-year-old male. This brings the total number of flu cases this season to three. The first confirmed flu case for New Castle County was announced last week. There are two main types of influenza (flu) virus – types A and B – that routinely spread in people and are responsible for seasonal flu outbreaks each year. All three lab-confirmed influenza cases were type B.

“With flu cases confirmed in all three counties, we are urging Delawareans not to delay getting their flu vaccine,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “Vaccination is not just about protecting yourself, it’s also about protecting your children who are quite vulnerable to effects of the flu, other family members and those with whom you work.” Vaccinations not only prevent people from getting the flu, but they can reduce the severity of flu illness and prevent visits to the doctor, clinic, emergency room and hospitalizations. Vaccinated people also have less chance of missing family, school and work events due to influenza illness.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced last week concerning national numbers that show only about half (54%) of pregnant women surveyed report getting a flu

vaccine either before or during pregnancy. When pregnant women are vaccinated they pass on antibodies to the fetus that provide protection after birth, during the time babies are too young to be vaccinated. Newborns who get influenza or whooping cough are at high risk of hospitalization and death. Additionally, pregnant women have more than double the risk of hospitalization compared to non-pregnant women of childbearing age if they get influenza. The CDC and DPH recommend that expectant mothers be up-to-date with recommended vaccinations as part of their routine prenatal care.

The flu vaccine is recommended for Delawareans 6 months of age and older. Since it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies that protect against influenza virus infection to develop in the body, it is important to get vaccinated as early as possible to give your body time to build immunity. DPH will offer various flu clinics throughout the season. A schedule can be found at <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/fluclinics.html>. Flu vaccines also are offered through physician offices, many pharmacies and some grocery stores. To locate where flu vaccines near you are being offered, Google "CDC flu finder" and enter a ZIP code.

Getting the flu vaccine now also will provide protection during the entire flu season. During the 2018-2019 flu season, Delaware recorded 6,387 laboratory-confirmed flu cases. More than 1,000 Delawareans were hospitalized due to the flu and 24 people died from flu complications.

The flu is easy to transmit and you can get it even from seemingly healthy, but unvaccinated, children and adults. Children, older adults, pregnant women and those who have chronic underlying medical conditions are most at-risk for complications from the flu and are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated now.

In addition to getting an annual flu vaccine, Delawareans can

prevent the spread of the flu and other respiratory illness with good hygiene: Wash hands frequently with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and dispose of tissues immediately. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your inner elbow. Droplets from a sneeze can travel up to six feet. Also avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Keep your distance from people who are coughing or sneezing.

Flu symptoms come on suddenly, and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches and body aches, chills and fatigue. Some people get complications including pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections. Those sick with the flu should stay home from work, school and other gatherings and not return until they have been free of fever – with a temperature of less than 100 degrees F (37.8 degrees C), without the use of fever-reducing medications – for at least 24 hours.

People with flu symptoms should avoid close contact with well people in the household and stay well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water and other clear liquids. Over-the-counter medicines can provide symptom relief, but 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. This is particularly important for those who feel very sick, are pregnant or have chronic medical conditions.

For more information about the flu and where to get vaccinated, visit flu.delaware.gov or call 1-800-282-8672.

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>.

The Delaware Department of 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.