

DPH Concerned About Increasing Number of Flu Cases As It Announces Additional Flu-Related Deaths

DOVER – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is expressing concern about the increasing number of laboratory-confirmed flu cases in the state as the agency announces additional flu-related deaths for the 2019-2020 season. To date, nine Delawareans have passed away due to flu-related complications during the 2019-2020 flu season. All nine individuals had underlying medical conditions.

Most recently, an 83-year-old woman from New Castle County who was diagnosed with influenza A passed away this week due to complications from the flu. Last week, a 59-year-old woman from New Castle County who was also diagnosed with influenza A passed away due to flu complications. Of the nine individuals who have passed away this season, they range in age from 29 to 96. Five persons were from New Castle County, one was from Kent County and three were from Sussex County. Six individuals were diagnosed with Influenza A and three were diagnosed with Influenza B. Only two of the nine individuals who died from flu complications received the flu vaccine this season.

As of February 15, 2020, there have been 5,047 confirmed cases of influenza in Delaware, including 267 hospitalizations. These numbers reflect only the number of lab-confirmed cases; the actual number of cases circulating statewide is likely much higher. By comparison, at the same time in the 2018-2019 season, there were 3,264 flu cases in Delaware, including 537 hospitalizations, and 13 flu-related deaths.

“We express our deepest condolences to the family and friends

of those we have lost due to seasonal influenza,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “It is still not too late to get the flu vaccine. People six months and older should receive the flu vaccine every year. The vaccine’s main purpose is to make you less likely to catch the flu, but if you do still get it, the vaccine will make your symptoms milder. It takes two weeks for the antibodies in the flu vaccine to become fully effective, so if you haven’t gotten the vaccine yet, you should make arrangements to do so as soon as possible. Always remember to take any antiviral medicine that your doctor prescribes as needed, also.”

In addition to getting a flu vaccine and taking antiviral medication, DPH recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. If no tissue is available, cough or sneeze into your inner elbow.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Over-the-counter medicines can provide symptom relief, but if you suspect you have influenza, call your doctor as he or she 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.

The risk for flu-related deaths is greatly increased in the very young, older individuals, and those of any age who have underlying health conditions. DPH continues to remind the public that there are steps they can take to prevent the

spread of the flu. It is important for older individuals with underlying health conditions not only to be vaccinated, but also to limit contact with anyone who may be sick with influenza, and to contact their health care provider as soon as they become ill. Also, family, friends, and caregivers of older individuals with underlying health conditions should be vaccinated and arrange for alternative care, if possible, if they become sick with influenza.

DPH also recommends that individuals with chronic diseases monitor and manage their conditions, as non-compliance with physician's recommendations can increase the risk for infection and complications. This includes maintaining appointments with their health care provider, taking medications as prescribed, and following diet and exercise recommendations from their doctor. Additionally, individuals who smoke and who are ready to stop using tobacco are encouraged to call the Delaware Quitline at 1-866-409-1858.

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. People with pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes and asthma are more susceptible to catching the flu.

Flu vaccines are available at many pharmacies and grocery stores, and through primary care physicians and some specialists. To find participating stores, enter your ZIP code in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's flu vaccine finder at www.cdc.gov/flu/. For more information about the flu, visit flu.delaware.gov/ or call DPH at 1-800-282-8672. Flu shots are still available at DPH clinics located within the State Service Centers:

- Porter State Service Center, 509 W. Eighth St., Wilmington. For all ages 9 and up. Walk-ins are welcome Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to noon and from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Hudson State Service Center, 501 Ogletown Road, Newark. For

all ages, including children age 6 months and older. Call 302-283-7587 (choose Option 2) to make an appointment Monday through Friday.

- Williams State Service Center, 805 River Road, Dover. For all ages, including children age 6 months and older. Call 302-857-5140 to make an appointment Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

- Milford State Service Center – Riverwalk, 253 N.E. Front St., Milford. For ages 9 years and older. Mondays and Fridays. Walk-ins are accepted on Mondays from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. By appointment only on Fridays from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Call 302-424-7130 to make an appointment.

- Anna C. Shipley State Service Center, 350 Virginia Ave., Seaford. For all ages, including children age 6 months and older. Walk-ins welcome Monday through Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

- Adams State Service Center, 544 S. Bedford St., Georgetown. For all ages, including children age 6 months and older. By appointment only. Call 302-515-3220 to make an appointment.

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.