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Widespread Influenza Activity Causing Long Wait Times at Emergency Rooms Statewide ADHS Advises Everyone to Get Vaccinated Immediately

PHOENIX – Influenza activity is at record levels in Arizona and there are several hospitals statewide experiencing long emergency room wait times due to the increased number of sick Arizonans. After consulting with healthcare and public health partners, the Arizona Department of Health Services is advising ill people to only seek emergency medical care if they are at high risk for serious complications or are experiencing severe symptoms.

“Influenza is a very serious illness, so if you’re at high risk or have symptoms such as difficulty breathing, chest pain, dizziness, confusion, persistent vomiting, cannot drink fluids, or have flu like symptoms that improve but then return with fever or worse cough, seek emergency medical care immediately,” said Dr. Cara Christ, director of the Arizona Department of Health Services.

People at high risk of serious complications from influenza are:

- Children younger than 5 years old
 - Adults aged 65 and older
- People with chronic disease, especially heart and lung disease
- People with immunosuppression, including that caused by medications or by HIV infection
 - Women who are pregnant or postpartum (within 2 weeks after delivery)
- People younger than 19 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
 - American Indians/Alaska Natives
 - People with extreme obesity
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities

“If you have symptoms and are in a high risk group, or if you feel very sick or worried about your illness, talk to your medical provider,” Dr. Christ said. “Most people with mild flu symptoms will get better without seeing the doctor and should stay home to prevent spreading it to others. It’s important to drink plenty of fluids and get plenty of rest when you have the flu. You can also

treat symptoms with over the counter medications."

Getting vaccinated against influenza is the most effective way to protect yourself from the disease. It can take up to two weeks to build full immunity to influenza after you are vaccinated, so everyone needs to get the flu shot immediately. People can find a place to get vaccinated at vaccinefinder.org. Even if you are vaccinated, you can help prevent influenza from spreading by washing your hands frequently, covering your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing, avoiding touching your face, and staying home when you are sick.

"Someone with influenza can spread the disease when they cough, sneeze, or talk, which creates influenza droplets that can land in the mouth or nose of someone nearby," Dr. Christ said. "You can also catch influenza by touching a surface or object that the virus lands on and then touching your mouth, nose, or other parts of your face. If you have the flu or flu-like symptoms, stay home. And if your kids have the flu or flu-like symptoms, keep them home from school."

There have been 7,978 cases of influenza reported this season, with 2,453 reported the last week of December 2017. Compared to the same time period in 2016, there were 834 total cases and 282 cases reported in the last week of December 2016. This is the highest number of seasonal cases this early since influenza tests became reportable. During the past two seasons, Arizona did not reach widespread activity until February.

For more questions about the influenza vaccine, contact the ADHS Immunization Program Office at (602) 364-3630 or your [county health department](#). You can stay up-to-date on influenza activity in Arizona throughout the season by viewing the weekly reports on the ADHS website at azhealth.gov/flu, or by subscribing to receive the influenza report via email at azhealth.gov/email.

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About us:

The award-winning, nationally recognized Arizona Department of Health Services is responsible for leading Arizona's public health system including responding to disease outbreaks, licensing health and childcare facilities, operating the Arizona State Hospital, and improving the overall health and wellness of all Arizonans.