



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama experiences significant H1N1 influenza activity this season

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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While the flu season is just getting started in much of the country, activity is already high in Alabama, along with Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas. Reports from Alabama's network of providers who report influenza-like illness and send influenza samples for testing to the Department of Public Health indicate the geographic spread of influenza in Alabama is widespread for the third week in a row.

Influenza type A, H1N1 (also known as 2009 H1N1, the pandemic strain, or pH1N1) has been the predominant strain of virus circulating so far this season. One characteristic of pH1N1 is that, similar to the 2009 pandemic, young and middle-aged adults seem to have a greater chance of severe influenza.

Flu is a very contagious respiratory illness. Some of the symptoms of influenza can be fever, cough, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose, headache, muscle aches and extreme fatigue. Influenza can be a serious disease for anyone, even children, pregnant women and previously healthy young adults.

An annual influenza vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older. The flu vaccine this year includes protection against H1N1. Flu vaccines are available as shots and nasal spray. Physicians, nurses and pharmacists can advise patients which type of flu vaccine is right for them.

In addition to taking the flu vaccine, other measures can reduce or prevent the spread of influenza. These include staying at home when sick, covering the mouth and nose with a tissue/cloth when coughing or sneezing, and washing hands or using hand sanitizer frequently.

Dr. Karen Landers, Assistant State Health Officer, said, "Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. It's not too late to get a flu vaccination to protect against this serious disease. People become protected about two weeks after receiving the vaccine." There are no reports of influenza vaccine shortages this season.

Contact your private provider, pharmacy or local county health department to receive an influenza vaccination. For more information contact the Immunization Division of the Alabama Department of Public Health at (334) 206-5023 or toll free at 800-469-4599.