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Contact: Office of Communications (614) 644-8562

First Pediatric Flu Death of Season Reported in Ohio

It's Not Too Late to Get a Flu Shot as Flu Season Lasts Until May

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) is reporting the state's first flu-associated pediatric death of the 2018-19 flu season, a 3-year-old boy from Highland County. The Highland County Health Department is investigating the death.

Flu activity traditionally begins to increase in October and can last as late as May, with cases typically peaking between December and February. There have been 1,832 flu-associated hospitalizations reported in Ohio so far this flu season – significantly fewer than the 8,611 reported during the same timeframe last year. During the 2017-18 flu season, Ohio reported six flu-associated pediatric deaths.

"It's not too late to get a flu shot. Getting the flu vaccine is the safest and most effective way to prevent the flu for everyone 6 months and older," said Sietske de Fijter, state epidemiologist and chief of the ODH Bureau of Infectious Diseases. "If you are sick with the flu, stay home from work or school to prevent spreading it to others," de Fijter said.

Symptoms of flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Flu vaccination is available at most healthcare providers' offices, local health departments and retail pharmacies. There are no flu vaccine shortages across Ohio at this time.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that healthcare providers prescribe one of two antiviral drugs as a second line of defense as soon as possible to patients with confirmed or suspected influenza who are hospitalized, have severe illness, or may be at higher risk for flu complications.

"These antiviral medications can reduce the severity of the flu and prevent serious flu complications," de Fijter said. "They work best when started within two days of getting sick."

Other effective ways to avoid getting or spreading the flu include: washing hands frequently or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer; covering coughs and sneezes with tissues or coughing or sneezing into elbows; avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth; and staying home when sick.

The number of flu-associated hospitalizations reported in Ohio so far this flu season is tracking below the five-year average.

More information about flu and flu activity in Ohio is available at www.flu.ohio.gov.

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