



**For Immediate Release:**

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## **Emergency Rooms See Increase due to Respiratory Illness**

Protect yourself against the Flu and get vaccinated today

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health has seen an increase over the past several weeks in emergency department visits for respiratory illness (fever, cough and sore throat). While most cases to date are caused by viruses other than influenza, flu activity is now on the rise and expected to get worse over the next few weeks. Everyone should take advantage of this window of opportunity to get vaccinated in order to have the best protection available throughout the flu season.

“We’re approaching the time of year when we typically see peak numbers of flu cases. There is still time to get a flu shot or the flu mist nasal spray vaccine. Protect yourself, your loved ones and those around you from this illness. The flu season does not end with the winter holidays, and flu can circulate as late as May” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “We cannot predict how severe or how mild a flu season will be. Flu is a serious illness and should be treated as such. Ample vaccine is already available in LA County in a variety of locations, including pharmacies, supermarkets, community clinics and doctors’ offices.”

Influenza accounts for up to 200,000 hospitalizations, and an average of 23,607 deaths in the U.S. each year, according to the CDC. Symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, headache, and muscle ache within the first three to five days of illness. Influenza activity usually peaks in late January or early February in LA County. After vaccination, the flu vaccine takes about two weeks to become effective.

“If you or a loved one becomes sick, stay home. Most individuals who get sick are able to treat themselves at home with over-the-counter medications, drinking plenty of fluids, resting and staying home from work or school. Others may develop complications such as pneumonia and may require hospitalization,” said Dr. Fielding. “Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. We urge everyone, six months of age and older, to be vaccinated against the flu, and to practice basic hygiene, such as washing your hands, to prevent the spread of the flu and other contagious diseases.”

While immunity from flu vaccination declines over time and the strain of flu virus that circulates changes from year to year, it is still the best protection people can have against acquiring the infection. It is recommended that everyone, six months of age and older, receive a flu vaccine every year. Residents are encouraged to contact their regular doctor for recommended vaccinations. Alternatively, supermarkets and pharmacies throughout the county are also offering seasonal flu vaccine for a low fee. Visit [www.ph.lacounty.gov/ip/flu/index.htm](http://www.ph.lacounty.gov/ip/flu/index.htm) to find a source for low-cost flu vaccinations.



For individuals without health insurance or another source of health care, free flu vaccine clinics operated by LA County Department of Public Health are available throughout the county. Visit the Public Health website at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, or call the LA County Information Line at 2-1-1 from any landline or cell phone in the county to find a free flu vaccine clinic.

While influenza vaccine is now recommended for everyone (except infants under six months of age), it is especially important that certain groups be vaccinated because they are either at greater risk of developing complications from the flu or because they live with or care for others who are at greater risk of developing complications. These groups are:

- Pregnant women;
- Children younger than five;
- Adults 65 years of age and older;
- People of any age with chronic medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes;
- People who live in nursing homes or long-term care facilities;
- People who live with or care for those at high-risk for complications from the flu, including health care and day care workers.

Influenza vaccination only works against the influenza viruses and does not protect against the many other viruses and bacteria that can cause upper respiratory disease. To help reduce the chances of catching either the flu or other illnesses, everyone is urged to practice basic hygiene. These healthy habits include:

- Washing your hands frequently, especially after using the restroom and before and after eating;
- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze;
- Not touching your nose, mouth or eyes to prevent the spread of germs;
- Staying home from work or school when sick.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises nearly 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: @LAPublicHealth.

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