

Written by Ryan C. Woods
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Reminds Public It's Not Too Late to Get a Flu Shot

CHICAGO – January 14, 2013. With Illinois and the nation facing a severe flu season and hospitals treating a surge of patients, Governor Pat Quinn and public health officials today urged the public to obtain a vaccination shot, the best protection against the seasonal flu.

“We are facing a very serious flu season both in Illinois and across the country,” Governor Quinn said. “We want everyone to take precautions to protect themselves and their families, friends and co-workers. We know that more than 60 percent of the public fails to take the important step of getting a flu shot. If you have not had a flu shot this season, now’s the time.”

The Governor also reminded Illinois residents that hygiene is also essential to fighting the flu. By washing your hands frequently and covering up when you cough, you can help protect yourself and those around you. And, when you do catch the flu, stay home and let it run its course.

Illinois is one of 24 states that are now reporting higher than normal flu activity this season. The number of flu-related intensive care unit (ICU) hospitalizations so far this year is 368, with 27 flu-related ICU deaths. The majority of hospitalizations and deaths are of people in their 50s and older. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) expects to see an increase in the number of hospitalizations and deaths as more health care providers report cases from previous weeks as well as current cases.

Public health officials note that the flu season imposes a financial cost each year across the nation. CDC projects the total economic burden of each flu season to be \$87.1 billion – which includes direct medical costs of \$10.4 billion and lost income due to illness or death estimated at \$16.3 billion each year. While hospitalization costs are important contributors, lost productivity from missed work days and lost lives comprise the bulk of the economic burden of influenza.

“We are definitely experiencing a severe flu season,” said IDPH Director Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck. “However, we have seen severe flu seasons before. IDPH and health care professionals

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around the state are doing everything in our power to raise awareness and reduce the number of people who become ill.

The strain of flu that is predominately circulating in Illinois and the country has historically been a more severe strain causing more hospitalizations and deaths.

Common symptoms of flu include sore throat, high fever, cough, body aches and fatigue. The IDPH recommends contacting a health professional before going to an emergency department if you are experiencing flu symptoms. The majority of people suffering from the flu simply need to stay home, rest, use over-the-counter remedies as needed and let the flu run its course. Several hospital emergency departments have recently had to refer patients with such symptoms to other hospitals as they were at capacity. Typically, only people with severe respiratory illness who have trouble breathing need to visit a hospital emergency department.

For those who still need to obtain a flu shot, you can visit www.idph.state.il.us and enter your zip code in the Flu Vaccine Finder. Although flu vaccine is still widely available, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that some doctors' offices and pharmacies are facing shortages. Be sure to call ahead before going to get a vaccination. Currently manufacturers project producing 135 million doses of flu vaccine this season. At this time, the CDC is indicating there are no known issues with the production of antivirals, such as Tamiflu. However, some areas across the country may experience a shortage because of high demand and pharmacies reordering at the same time.

The vaccine is recommended for everyone six months and older. The flu season normally runs through March and sometimes later. The estimated effectiveness of the vaccine is 62 percent. If you have been vaccinated, but still get the flu, the vaccine can reduce the amount of time you're sick and the severity of symptoms. By getting vaccinated, you can also help protect infants, the elderly and those with chronic diseases who are at greatest risk for complications due to the flu.

For more information about the seasonal flu shot, visit www.idph.state.il.us/flu/ , www.flu.gov ,
or
www.walgreens.com/flu

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