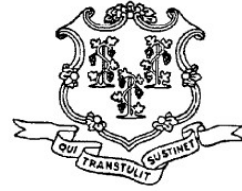


News



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Health Department Expands Availability of Flu Vaccine for Children

Flu activity in state remains widespread

Hartford – In response to continued widespread flu activity in the state, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced that it has temporarily expanded the availability of state-supplied seasonal flu vaccine to include all children 5 through 18 years of age, regardless of their insurance status. Residents who have not yet been vaccinated are encouraged to get the flu vaccine.

“The flu can cause severe illness and complications among our most vulnerable residents, including children,” said Governor Dannel P. Malloy. “We must be proactive in protecting our children from the flu and continue to vaccinate as many children as we can, which is why we are making the state’s vaccine supply available to all of Connecticut’s children.”

DPH’s most recent flu activity report shows that emergency department visits and outpatient visits related to influenza and influenza-like illness remain at high levels throughout the state. The state has seen a large increase in influenza-related hospitalizations during the past six weeks. So far this season, there have been 2,456 laboratory confirmed reports of influenza and 467 influenza-related hospitalizations.

“We continue to see widespread flu activity and high levels of flu-related hospitalizations across the state,” said DPH Commissioner Dr. Jewel Mullen. “Getting a flu shot is still the best tool we have to protect people from the flu and prevent serious flu-related illness.”

Before today’s announcement, seasonal flu vaccine was available through DPH’s Connecticut Vaccine Program (CVP) to all children aged 6 months to 59 months of age and Medicaid-enrolled, uninsured or underinsured children 5 through 18 years of age. For the remainder of the influenza season, seasonal flu vaccine will be available to providers who are enrolled in the CVP for all of Connecticut’s children.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourage all people over the age of six months old to be vaccinated. Vaccines are encouraged for everyone, but especially for high-risk groups, including children from 6 months to 18 years of age, women who will be pregnant during the flu season, people at least 50 years old, anyone with certain chronic medical conditions and people who live in nursing homes or long-term care facilities.

Residents of our largest cities, especially those who are poor and live in densely populated areas, may be at more risk of developing serious complications from the flu than other state residents. People living in urban communities are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated for the flu.

To get vaccinated for the flu:

- Check with your regular health care provider to see if they have the flu vaccine available.
- Visit the HealthMap Vaccine Finder at <http://flushot.healthmap.org/> to find a flu clinic near you.
- Check with your local health department. You can find your local health department at www.ct.gov/dph/localhealth.

Whether you get the flu vaccine or not, there are ways you can avoid the flu this year and stay healthy:

- **Wash your hands often** with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.
- **Stay home when you are sick.** If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- **Call your healthcare provider immediately** if you develop flu symptoms to determine if a medical evaluation is necessary; antiviral medications can help if taken early in the illness.

For more information on influenza and vaccination, visit the DPH website at www.ct.gov/dph. For the latest influenza statistics in Connecticut, go to www.ct.gov/dph/flustats.

The Connecticut Department of Public Health is the state's leader in public health policy and advocacy with a mission to protect and promote the health and safety of the people of our state. To contact the department, please visit its website at www.ct.gov/dph or call (860) 509-7270.

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