

January 22, 2018

Dear Parents:

**The Florida Department of Health (the Department) reports that influenza, or “flu,” activity levels have increased sharply over the last several weeks.** Flu is a contagious respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. Serious outcomes of flu infection can result in hospitalization or death. Some people, such as young children, the elderly, and people with certain health conditions are at high risk for serious complications from flu. The Department is encouraging families to get vaccinated for flu now.

**Vaccination is the best way to protect against the flu and severe complications from the flu.** Vaccination is most crucial for children with underlying health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions. The flu vaccine is offered in many locations including pharmacies, clinics, employers, and schools. Contact your health care provider, county health department, or visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov/findaflushot> to find a flu vaccine center near you.

**The flu vaccine is safe.** The national Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that all individuals six months of age and older receive the flu vaccine **each year**. Since infants under six months of age are too young to get vaccinated against influenza, it is important that family members (including pregnant or breastfeeding mothers) and other caregivers for these children be vaccinated to help protect them from the disease.

It is especially important that parents **keep sick children at home** to prevent spreading the flu virus to others. Additional flu prevention steps include staying away from people who are sick, covering sneezes or coughs with a tissue or your elbow, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and frequent handwashing.


**If your child becomes sick with flu-like illness, contact your health care provider as soon after symptoms begin as possible. Symptoms of the flu often include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headaches, or fatigue.** Antiviral medication for flu has been shown to reduce severity and length of disease, decrease the risk of complications from influenza, and reduce the risk of death among hospitalized patients, particularly in those that start treatment early in their illness. Health care providers can prescribe antiviral treatment if appropriate. Treatment is most effective when started within 48 hours, so contacting your health care provider as soon as your child becomes ill is important, especially if your child has underlying health conditions.

**The best way to keep yourself and your family safe and healthy during flu season is to:**

- **Get vaccinated;**
- **Keep sick family members home;**
- **Contact your health care provider if you or your child are experiencing flu-like symptoms; and**
- **Follow your doctor’s guidance on treatment.**

For more information, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/parents/index.htm>.

Sincerely,



Dr. Todd Sparger