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GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

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Pediatric flu deaths confirmed in Michigan, first two of the 2019-2020 season

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) has confirmed the first influenza-associated pediatric deaths of the 2019-2020 flu season in Michigan. Influenza claims the lives of children every year across the United States. MDHHS is urging residents to get vaccinated for protection this season.

The reported deaths involve children from Shiawassee and Wayne counties who were infected with Influenza B. Nationally, there have been 32 influenza-associated pediatric deaths reported during the 2019-2020 flu season. Additional possible cases will continue to be investigated by state and local public health agencies.

“These tragic deaths are a reminder of how serious influenza can be,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health for MDHHS. “I urge all Michiganders ages 6 months and older to get their flu shots if they have not already done so this season. It is not too late.”

Flu is a contagious respiratory disease caused by different strains of the influenza virus and can result in mild to severe illness. Michigan has experienced widespread flu activity over the past few weeks. A majority of the positive influenza specimens confirmed by MDHHS Bureau of Laboratories this flu season have been Influenza B virus.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), during last year’s flu season there were an estimated 34,200 deaths from influenza. In Michigan, four children died last year due to flu-related complications, while nationally there were 136 flu-related deaths among children.

MDHHS strongly recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get a seasonal flu vaccine. Flu vaccine is the best way to prevent against getting the flu and can also reduce the severity of flu illness. During the 2018-2019 flu season, only 46.1 percent of Michigan residents were vaccinated against flu, below the national rate of 49.2 percent.

Vaccines are especially important for people at increased risk for complications from flu, including children, adults aged 65 years and older, persons of any age with underlying medical conditions and pregnant women. Children less than 6 months of age are too young to be vaccinated and need to be protected by vaccination of their close contacts, including parents, siblings, grandparents, childcare workers and healthcare personnel.

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It takes up to two weeks after the vaccine is administered before the body builds up enough immunity to prevent the flu, so Michigan residents should get vaccinated now to protect themselves before flu activity increases in Michigan. The flu shot is made with inactivated or killed viruses and cannot give you influenza.

There is still plenty of flu vaccine available. To find flu vaccine near you, call your healthcare provider, local health department or check the Health Map Vaccine Finder at Flushot.healthmap.org. For more information about the flu, visit Michigan.gov/flu.

To learn more about the influenza vaccine and other vaccines, visit IVaccinate.org.

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