

**ISDH Long Term Care
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In Today's Issue:

- Influenza Information

Flu Season Begins

State health officials want Hoosiers to be prepared for what could be a severe flu season. In early December, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that H3N2 flu viruses have been the most common so far this flu season. Historically, during seasons where H3N2 viruses are dominant, more hospitalizations and deaths have been reported.

Adding to health officials' concerns is the finding that roughly half of the H3N2 viruses analyzed last month by CDC, were found to be "drift variants," which means they have genetic changes that make them different from the one used for this season's flu vaccine.

"Influenza is always unpredictable, but indications are that this season could be severe, so Hoosiers should be prepared," said State Health Commissioner Jerome Adams, M.D., M.P.H. "Although the vaccine's ability to protect against the H3N2 strain of flu this season may not be as high as we would like, the vaccine will protect against other strains of circulating flu virus, and those who get vaccinated may have a milder case if flu of they do get it."

Dr. Adams advises taking all steps necessary to protect you and your family from getting the flu, including:

- Get vaccinated: the influenza vaccine is the single best way to protect against flu.
- See a health care provider: influenza antiviral drugs can reduce the severity and length of flu if taken within 48 hours of showing symptoms. High risk individuals should seek treatment as soon as possible after symptoms develop. High risk individuals include children under the age of two, pregnant women, adults over the age of 65, and any individuals with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, or chronic respiratory disease.
- Prevent spread: wash your hands frequently, cover your cough and stay home from work and school when you are sick.

On December 8, the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) reported the first influenza-related death of the season which occurred in an unvaccinated patient older than 65 years. Adults aged 65 years and older are at high risk of influenza-related complications.

"Tragically, we reported our first flu-related death and we fully expect there will be more," said Dr. Adams, "That's why taking steps to protect you and your family is so important."

All individuals over 6 months of age are recommended to get vaccinated. State health officials also encourage influenza vaccination of health care workers, household contacts and caregivers of children less than 6 months of age, as well as household contacts of people at high risk for flu complications.

Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death. Flu viruses are spread from person to person mainly through coughing or

sneezing. People with the flu are contagious one day before they get sick and for five days after becoming sick.

Symptoms of the flu include:

- Fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or greater
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Cough
- Muscle aches
- Sore throat

Individuals who experience these symptoms should see a healthcare provider.

Since flu season coincides with football season, once again the Indiana State Department of Health and the Indianapolis Colts have teamed up to promote influenza vaccination and prevention through the campaign, Join Blue, Prevent the Flu! Watch the video at <http://www.colts.com/videos/videos/Join-Blue-Prevent-the-Flu/0dce740c-1c62-48d1-9c99-2bc761dca75d>.

Visit the Indiana State Department of Health at www.StateHealth.in.gov. Follow the Indiana State Department of Health on Twitter at [@StateHealthIN](https://twitter.com/StateHealthIN) and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/isdh1 for important health updates.

Influenza Guidance for Long Term Care Facilities

Influenza activity has started to peak in the United States and Indiana. Currently, Influenza A H3N2 is the predominant virus in circulation and CDC has reported that about half of the H3N2 viruses tested are drifted strains that do not match the H3N2 virus in the 2014-2015 vaccine. The predominance of the influenza virus may change as the season progresses. Although vaccine effectiveness may be reduced because of the drifted strains, it may still protect against severe outcomes, such as hospitalizations and deaths. Because of the mismatch, CDC and ISDH emphasize prompt administering of antiviral medications, oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and inhaled zanamivir (Relenza) within 48 hours of symptom onset. It is recommended that providers do not wait until laboratory confirmation of influenza before medicating. Antiviral treatment is especially important among adults 65 and older and may reduce the duration of symptoms and the severity of complications.

It is recommended that long term care facilities should take extra precaution to ensure that residents are:

- vaccinated for influenza; and
- receive prompt antiviral treatment within 48 hours of influenza symptom onset.

It is also recommended that all health care personnel are also vaccinated for influenza. CDC advises that, in the past, influenza outbreaks in long term care facilities have been attributed to low vaccination coverage among health care personnel and that higher influenza vaccination levels can reduce influenza-related illnesses within these institutions.

If there is at least one laboratory-confirmed case or two or more residents ill with respiratory symptoms, the following steps are recommended by the CDC:

- Daily surveillance among residents for influenza-like illness
- Influenza testing when any resident has respiratory symptoms that could be due to influenza. Note that elderly, medically fragile or those with neurological or neurocognitive conditions may manifest atypical signs with influenza infection and may not present with fever.
- Implement standard and droplet precautions
- Encourage good hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and limit social gathering
- Administer antiviral treatment to all long term care residents who have confirmed or suspect influenza
- Administer antiviral chemoprophylaxis to non-ill residents, regardless of influenza vaccination
- Consider offering antiviral chemoprophylaxis to unvaccinated health care personnel

Long term care facilities should report influenza outbreaks as defined by the regulations that govern them.

Influenza Prevention Measures

Consider the following additional measures to reduce transmission among long term care residents and health care personnel:

- Have symptomatic residents stay in their own rooms as much as possible, including restricting them from common activities, and have their meals served in their rooms when possible.
- Limit the number of large group activities in the facility and consider serving all meals in resident rooms if possible when the outbreak is widespread (involving multiple units of the facility).
- Avoid new admissions or transfers to wards with symptomatic residents.
- Limit visitation and exclude ill persons from visiting the facility via posted notices. Consider restricting visitation by children during community outbreaks of influenza.
- Monitor personnel absenteeism due to respiratory symptoms and exclude those with influenza-like symptoms from work until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever.
- Restrict personnel movement from areas of the facility having illness to areas not affected by the outbreak.
- Administer the current season's influenza vaccine to unvaccinated residents and health care personnel as per current vaccination recommendations.

For the latest information on influenza vaccination, see CDC's seasonal influenza vaccination resources for health professionals page(<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/index.htm>).

Additional information on CDC's Toolkit for Influenza Outbreak Management in LTC facilities can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/ltc-facility-guidance.htm>.

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