

**Mission:**

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS**  
State Surgeon General & Secretary

**Vision:** To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

December 5, 2014

Dear Colleague:

The 2014-15 flu season is off to an earlier than usual start in Florida. **People who have not yet been vaccinated this season should get vaccinated now. We urge you to actively identify, recommend and offer flu vaccine to patients in your clinics who have not yet been vaccinated.** Everyone 6 months and older is recommended for annual flu vaccination with rare exception. Please refer to the attached guidance document for additional information regarding influenza vaccination, antivirals and chemoprophylaxis.

In the last several weeks, influenza and influenza-like illness (ILI) activity levels have steadily increased across the state. At this point in the 2014-15 season, **influenza activity is highest in children but overall is widely spread throughout Florida.** The proportion of visits to emergency departments (ED) and urgent care centers (UCC) with a chief complaint of ILI or discharge diagnosis of influenza for those 18 years and under are higher than they have been during the previous four influenza seasons at this time and are at or near what we typically see at the peak of flu season. **Increased influenza activity in children regularly comes ahead of increased activity in all other age groups.** In the last week, the proportion of pregnant women seeking care at EDs and UCCs for flu has increased is similar to what we have previously seen at the height of flu season. The Department has also received reports of the first two influenza-associated pediatric deaths of the 2014-15 influenza season. Although both of these children were at higher risk for severe influenza complications, neither received the 2014-15 flu vaccine.

**Influenza A (H3) is the predominantly circulating strain of influenza so far this season.** While it is too early to tell if this flu season will be worse than other years, seasons when influenza A (H3) predominantly circulates are often associated with higher morbidity and mortality, particularly in the elderly and very young. **Since October 1, 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified an antigenically drifted influenza A (H3N2) strain circulating that is different from the strain of influenza A (H3N2) contained in the current 2014-15 influenza vaccine formulations.** Vaccination is still recommended as it provides some protection against drifted viruses and it can also protect against other circulating strains. **The CDC recommends early neuraminidase inhibitor antiviral administration of medications for treatment and prevention influenza, as an adjunct to vaccination.**

Contact your county health department if you suspect an outbreak of flu or ILI, an influenza-associated pediatric mortality, if you see an unusually severe presentation of flu or if you suspect anti-viral resistance in a patient. Influenza outbreaks and influenza-associated pediatric mortalities are required to be reported per Florida Administrative Code, Chapter 64D-3. Visit [www.flhealth.gov/floridaflu](http://www.flhealth.gov/floridaflu) for further guidance and surveillance data. Thank you for your important contribution to protecting Floridians from influenza!

Sincerely,

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