

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH OFFICIALS ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS AND VISITORS
TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS AND LESSEN FLU RISK THIS HOLIDAY SEASON**

TALLAHASSEE—With signs that flu is increasing earlier than usual in some Florida communities, Florida Department of Health (DOH) officials are urging residents and visitors to take precautions to limit their risk of exposure to seasonal flu.

“The most effective precautions we can take to fight illness are getting vaccinated against the flu virus and diligently practicing good hygiene,” said Julia Gill, Ph.D., M.P.H., Disease Control Division Director. “This season, everyone 6 months and older should get vaccinated, even if they got a seasonal or 2009 H1N1 vaccine last season. With the holidays in full swing and many people traveling, this simple precaution can lessen your risk of exposure to the virus or transmission to others.”

Seasonal flu is an infection of the respiratory tract caused by the influenza virus. Compared with most other viral respiratory infections, such as the common cold, influenza infection often causes a more severe illness. Symptoms of influenza include headache, fever, cough, body aches or extreme tiredness.

The following preventive measures can also help reduce risk of contracting the flu:

- Get re-vaccinated every flu season because flu viruses change each year.
- Persons who are sick with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 24 hours after fever has subsided without the use of fever-reducing medicine, except to get medical care.
- Persons with a chronic illness, or who are pregnant, should contact their health care provider if they suspect their illness that might be influenza. Health care providers can prescribe antiviral medication.
- Everyone should cover his or her nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and throw the tissue in the trash after use. It is advisable to avoid touching one’s eyes, nose and mouth.
- Despite being sick or in good health, everyone should wash his or her hands with soap and water often. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Regardless of age, persons with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and cancer are at higher risk for having a more severe case of influenza or of suffering from complications caused by influenza. In addition, people who have neurological and developmental disorders and who are obese are also at increased risk of severe influenza.

To locate flu vaccine in your area, contact a local health care provider or visit: http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Disease_ctrl/immune/flu/flu_locator.htm or contact a local County Health Department <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/chdsitelist.htm>.

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