

Mission:

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



Ron DeSantis
Governor

Scott A. Rivkees, MD
State Surgeon General

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

September 2, 2019

Dear Long-Term Care Facility Administrators and Directors:

The 2019–20 influenza season is fast approaching. Influenza activity levels remained low throughout the summer months, but are expected to increase as we head into the fall. While activity has remained low overall, sporadic outbreaks in assisted living facilities, skilled nursing facilities, and other long-term care facilities have continued to be reported throughout the summer months in Florida. Of the 234 respiratory disease outbreaks reported during the last season, 67 outbreaks (29%) were reported in assisted living facilities, skilled nursing facilities, and other long-term care facilities. One or more hospitalizations were reported in 37 (55%) outbreaks in these settings, and one or more deaths were reported in 11 outbreaks (16%). Sadly, in many of these outbreaks, vaccination rates were low (particularly among staff), and antivirals were not consistently administered as recommended by county health departments.

The Florida Department of Health urges you to actively recommend and offer influenza vaccines to all residents, staff, and health care personnel (HCP) who have not yet received their 2019–20 vaccinations. Some facilities have also found success in vaccinating family members by promoting vaccination on visit days.

Human immune defenses grow weaker with age, putting adults aged 65 and older at greater risk for severe complications, including death, as a result of influenza infection. While influenza seasons vary in severity from season to season, adults aged 65 and older usually experience the greatest burden of disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 70–90% of seasonal influenza-related deaths and 50–70% of influenza-related hospitalizations in recent years occurred in adults aged 65 years and older.

The influenza vaccine is safe and continues to be the best way to protect yourself, residents, staff, and HCP. The national Advisory Committee on Immunizations Practices recommends all individuals aged 6 months of age and older receive the influenza vaccine each season. CDC recommends early treatment (even without laboratory confirmation of influenza) with antiviral medications to reduce the risk of severe complications in adults aged 65 years and older, especially those with underlying medical conditions. CDC also recommends that antivirals be administered as chemoprophylaxis to all at-risk individuals in the event of an outbreak of influenza or influenza-like illness (ILI) (two or more individuals with ILI). **If you suspect an outbreak of influenza or ILI, please immediately implement outbreak control measures and contact your county health department:**

FloridaHealth.gov/CHDEpiContact. Florida Administrative Code, Chapter 64D-3 requires reporting outbreaks to your county health department: FloridaHealth.gov/diseasereporting. More information about influenza in long-term care facilities can be found here: www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/ltc-facility-guidance.htm. Thank you for your important contribution to protecting Floridians from influenza!

Sincerely,

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Director
Division of Disease Control & Health Protection
State Epidemiologist

CB/kk