

Mission:

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



Rick Scott
Governor

Celeste Philip, MD, MPH
Surgeon General and Secretary

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

January 31, 2018

Dear Health Care and Health Insurance Providers,

Influenza and influenza-like illness activity levels are high statewide in people of all age groups. Florida is experiencing a moderately severe season with emergency department visits for influenza-like illness well above peak levels observed in previous seasons and more outbreaks reported than in previous seasons at this time, and we are aware of at least three pediatric deaths. With influenza activity continuing to increase, we must do everything in our power to minimize its impacts and keep Floridians safe. Plan providers play an important role in helping to ensure access to care, disease prevention and lifesaving medications. The Florida Department of Health (DOH) urges the following:

Ensuring promotion, easy access, and coverage for influenza vaccine

Please assist us to ensure vaccine provision and availability. Ensure plans have provisions for covering influenza vaccinations for all patients six months and older. Remind providers to order and administer vaccine to their patients. Studies have shown that people are more likely to get vaccinated if it is recommended by their provider. DOH encourages providers to actively identify, recommend and offer flu vaccine to patients in clinics who have not received their 2017-18 influenza vaccinations.

Ensuring rapid use and availability of antivirals

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the use of antiviral treatment as soon as possible for all persons with suspected influenza for all hospitalizations, severely ill, and people who are at higher risk for complications (children under 2 years old, adults aged 65 years and older, pregnant women, and those with underlying medical conditions). Treatment should be administered within 48 hours of illness onset (but treatment administered after this period can still be beneficial). A recent CDC health advisory stresses the importance of rapid and early antiviral treatment this season (<http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/documents/cdc-han-influenza-12-27-2017.pdf>).

Lifting pre-authorization requirements for antivirals

DOH is aware of reports of insurers asking for preauthorization and approval for administration of antivirals. This process delays appropriate treatment and treatment within the recommended timeline. DOH encourages health insurers to lift such pre-authorization requirements. Delays in obtaining antivirals adversely impacts patient outcomes.

Suspend antiviral brand preferences

CDC is aware of spot shortages of antiviral drugs in some places experiencing high influenza activity. While this is not a true shortage but a result of retail pharmacies dispensing their in-house supply quicker than they can restock, it has created situations where only certain antivirals (e.g. brand or generic forms of oseltamivir) are available in some locations. Please consider suspending any existing formulary preferences for antivirals to ensure patients get timely access to needed antiviral medications.

Please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/index.htm> for additional information from the CDC regarding influenza vaccination, antivirals, and chemoprophylaxis. We would also appreciate help distributing the CDC guidance document: Prevention Strategies for Seasonal Influenza in Healthcare Settings (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/healthcaresettings.htm>).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Philip', written in a cursive style.

Celeste Philip, MD, MPH
Surgeon General and Secretary