

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

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Dear Long-Term Care Facility Administrators and Directors:

The 2020–21 influenza season is quickly approaching, though the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic continues to impact the health of Floridians. Influenza activity levels remained low throughout the summer months but are expected to increase as we head into the fall. There were 306 influenza and influenza-like-illness (ILI) outbreaks reported during the last season, of which 86 outbreaks (28%) were reported in assisted living facilities, skilled nursing facilities, and other long-term care facilities. 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 2020–21 vaccinations. 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. Though getting an influenza vaccine will not protect against COVID-19, getting an influenza vaccine this season is more important than ever to help reduce burden on the health care system and to protect vulnerable populations such as adults aged 65 and older.

Adults aged 65 and older are at greater risk for severe complications, including death, as a result of influenza infection, and usually experience the greatest burden of disease during an influenza season. 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. 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). The same social distancing and respiratory hygiene measures that are effective at preventing COVID-19 are also helpful in minimizing the spread of other respiratory viruses, such as influenza.

If you suspect an outbreak of influenza or ILI, please immediately implement outbreak control measures and contact your county health department: [FloridaHealth.gov/CHDEpiContact](https://www.floridahealth.gov/CHDEpiContact). Florida Administrative Code, Chapter 64D-3 requires reporting outbreaks to your county health department: [FloridaHealth.gov/diseasereporting](https://www.floridahealth.gov/diseasereporting).

If you have questions about other respiratory diseases, including COVID-19, please contact your local county health department ([FloridaHealth.gov/CHDEpiContact](https://www.floridahealth.gov/CHDEpiContact)) for the most up-to-date guidance. 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