



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Flu Illness on the Rise in Kent County

GRAND RAPIDS – The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) is seeing an increase in the number of suspected flu cases reported from area emergency departments and health care providers, in comparison to what is typical this time of year. More than 10% of people visiting emergency departments in Kent County last week were suffering from flu-like illness, and 6 out of ten patients presenting with flu-like illness were under the age of 18. So far this season, there have been 74 confirmed cases of flu reported to KCHD (not every person who is sick with influenza goes to a health care provider or gets tested, so the actual number of illnesses is likely much higher).

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. Flu viruses can spread when people with flu cough, sneeze, or even talk. Someone might also get flu by touching a surface or object (like a phone) that has flu virus on it, and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or nose. The flu can cause mild to severe illness, and in some cases, it can be deadly. Signs and symptoms can include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue (very tired), vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults). Not everyone with flu will experience all of the symptoms.

The flu can have serious complications for children under the age of five, the elderly, and people with already-weakened immune systems. The CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone over 6 months of age to protect against flu viruses. "We know there has been some mutation in the flu virus that was expected for this year when the influenza vaccine was produced," says Adam London, Administrative Health Officer for the Kent County Health Department. "But the flu vaccine is still very useful and the best protection you can get against influenza. Even in those cases where people get the flu, the illness is not as severe as it is in those unvaccinated."

Now is the time to get you and your family vaccinated. It can take about two weeks for the vaccination to become effective. The Kent County Health Department seasonal influenza program provides vaccinations for all individuals six months of age and older. The cost of the vaccine ranges from \$39-\$55; FluMist nasal spray (a live, preservative-free, four strain vaccine) is available for \$41.

Children from six months through eighteen years who have no insurance, or who have insurance that doesn't cover vaccines, will pay a sliding scale administration fee of up to \$15. The Health Department can only bill Medicaid and Medicare; private insurance is not accepted. Cash, check, MasterCard, Visa, or Discover are accepted. To make an appointment at any of our four clinic locations, call (616) 632-7200. You can also schedule online at www.stickittotheflu.com.

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.