

NC Suffers First Flu Death Of The Season

By Administrator

Friday, 16 October 2020 10:43 - Last Updated Friday, 16 October 2020 10:45

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services officials announced the first reported flu-related death of the 2020-21 flu season, which occurred the first week of October and involved an adult over 65 years of age in the central part of the state. NCDHHS staff and leadership extend their sympathies to the family and loved ones of this individual during this difficult time. To protect the privacy of the family, the person's hometown, county, age and gender will not be released. "This is a sad reminder that flu can be a serious illness and can lead to complications and even death in some cases," said State Epidemiologist Zack Moore, M.D., MPH. "With flu season starting during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever for people to get a flu vaccine this year."

During the 2019-20 flu season, 186 flu deaths were reported in North Carolina, down from 208 deaths during the 2018-19 flu season. Of those 186 deaths, 105 were people age 65 and older and five were under the age of 18.

The flu vaccine is the best way to prevent flu and its complications. It lowers your likelihood of getting sick. And if you do catch the flu, it's likely to be milder than if you weren't vaccinated. Each year, scientists and health experts develop seasonal flu shots to protect against the three or four flu strains that research suggests will be most common during the upcoming season. The vaccine works by triggering your body to produce protective antibodies that help prevent the flu.

The CDC recommends flu vaccination every year for everyone 6 months and older. Vaccination is the best way to prevent infection with the flu. It is especially important for those at higher risk of more serious outcomes, such as people over 65 years old, children younger than 5, pregnant women and those with certain medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Some of these same groups are also at high risk of complications from COVID-19.

Flu vaccinations are available at hospitals, pharmacies, private medical offices, some federally qualified health care centers and local health departments. To find a flu vaccine near you, visit vaccinefinder.org/find-vaccine.

In North Carolina, flu infections are most common from late fall to early spring with activity usually peaking in January or February. In addition to getting a flu vaccine, the following precautions should be taken to protect against the spread of flu, COVID-19 and other viruses:

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- Continue to practice the 3Ws — wearing a face covering over your nose and mouth, waiting 6 feet apart, and washing your hands often can help slow the spread of COVID-19 and flu
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and then discard the tissue promptly
- Stay home when sick, except to seek medical care or testing, and take steps to avoid spreading infection to others in your home, including:

- o Staying in a separate room from other household members, if possible

- o Using a separate bathroom, if possible

- o Avoiding contact with other members of the household and pets

- o Not sharing personal household items like cups, towels and utensils

- o Wearing a mask when around other people, if you are able to

Individuals who feel ill should call ahead before going to a doctor's office, local health department or urgent care to avoid exposing others. COVID-19 and flu symptoms are similar, so consult with a doctor about getting tested for flu and/or COVID-19. Flu symptoms include:

- Fever

- Cough and/or sore throat

- Runny or stuffy nose

- Headaches and/or body aches

- Chills

- Fatigue

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Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea (most common in children)

Anyone who thinks they have the flu should also contact their doctor right away to see if they need treatment with a prescription antiviral drug. Early treatment with an antiviral drug can help prevent flu infections from becoming more serious. Treatment with a prescription antiviral drug is especially important for hospitalized patients, people with severe flu illness and those who are at high risk of serious flu complications based on their age or health.

DPH's surveillance for the 2020-21 flu season began Sept. 27 and will continue through late May. A combined COVID-19 and influenza surveillance summary that includes information on flu-related deaths and activity is posted every Thursday at flu.nc.gov.