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GET A FLU VACCINE AND TAKE OTHER PRECAUTIONS TO AVOID THIS SEVERE FLU SEASON

MORGANTOWN, WV — (JANUARY 24, 2018)

Because of the severity of the 2017-18 flu season, which recently claimed the life of a 6-year-old Ohio County child, Monongalia County Health Department officials want to remind the public that flu vaccines are still available and advisable.

“A flu vaccination is the most effective way to avoid the flu,” said Dr. Lee B. Smith, county health officer and executive director of the Monongalia County Health Department. “This season has a higher-than-normal death rate that is affecting extremes of age, young and old, and also young and healthy.”

Just about everyone above the age of 6 months should get the flu vaccination, including the elderly and people with conditions that compromise their immune systems. Pregnant women should get a flu vaccination not only for themselves but also to pass on protection to their babies once they are born because they cannot be inoculated immediately.

Those with allergies to eggs should talk to their physicians about whether they can safely get a flu vaccination.

Flu vaccines are available at the Monongalia County Health Department through its Clinical Services program by making an appointment. The health department is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays. Call 304-598-5119 to make an appointment.

Other ways to prevent the flu are to wash your hands often and thoroughly, using soap and warm water. Avoid sick people; avoid touching your nose, eyes and mouth; and clean and disinfect areas that may be contaminated with germs.
If you do get sick, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) recommends staying home for at least 24 hours after your fever has gone away, other than to seek medical treatment.

“If one is ill, they need to stay home to avoid the spread of the flu,” Smith added.

Health officials are also recommending the use of an antiviral medication such as Tamiflu for those who get the flu to shorten duration and severity of the illness. Antibiotics are not effective in fighting flu but are sometimes prescribed for secondary bronchial infections. Other ways to help recover from flu is to get plenty of rest and stay hydrated.

Flu season is unpredictable and often does not peak until February or March.

According to the state Department of Health and Human Resource’s Bureau for Public Health, the number of laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza reported during the week of Jan. 7 to 13 was 846. It was 1,438 the week before that. It was also noted that influenza is a highly under-reported illness as most healthy people do not seek medical attention and rapid flu tests are not reportable.

The Bureau for Public Health also tracks the percentage of those seeking care for flu-like symptoms in outpatient clinics and emergency departments in addition to tracking the number of laboratory-confirmed influenza test results. A higher percentage of individuals are seeking care for influenza-like symptoms this season than in the past five years, the Bureau reported.

On the average, about 400 people die each season from influenza or pneumonia and they are usually 65 years or older. The death of the 6-year-old was the first pediatric death from the flu since the 2014-15 season.

The severity of the flu season is being blamed primarily on a low flu vaccination rate as well as the H3N2 strain that is currently circulating. H3 seasons are associated with more severe illness and higher rates of hospitalization and death. The vaccine can help prevent flu or lessen the severity of symptoms if one does become ill.

For more information or to make an appointment for a flu vaccine, call the Monongalia County Health Department (www.monchd.org) at 304-598-5119.

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