

Message from Sara H. Cody, M.D., Santa Clara County Health Officer

Flu Update



Earlier this month you may have heard that first adult influenza death in the state this flu season occurred in Santa Clara County, and just days later we learned of the first infant death in our state (in Stanislaus County). These deaths are a somber reminder that the 2015–2016 flu season is now underway. While flu virus spreads every year, the timing, severity, and length of the season varies from one year to the next. It's too early to predict if this will be a particularly bad flu season, but it appears that most of the flu viruses circulating right now are influenza A (H3N2), just like last year—and years when H3 flu strains predominate tend to be more severe. Currently, flu activity is sporadic in our community, but the flu season typically peaks between December and February. So, now is a great time to get vaccinated—especially before the holidays, when many people gather together in close contact.

You may have heard that this year's flu vaccine appears to be a good match for the flu strains that are circulating so far. This is good news for all of us, and all the more reason to get vaccinated against the flu. While flu vaccines are not always 100% effective in preventing you from becoming sick, getting the vaccine can help you be less sick even if you do get the flu. That means you'll miss fewer days at work or school and be less likely to have a severe case of the flu that could lead to hospitalization or even death. Remember, flu vaccines do not actually give you the flu.

Flu vaccinations are recommended every year for everyone 6 months of age and over, including healthy children and adults. It is especially important to get a flu vaccine if you are:

- 6 months through 18 years of age (especially under 5 years of age)
- 50 years of age and older (especially over 65 years of age)
- Pregnant or just had a baby
- Living in a nursing home or long-term care home
- Living with a weakened immune system or chronic medical condition (obesity, asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease)
- Living with or caring for someone in the above groups
- A healthcare provider

Most physician offices, clinics, and pharmacies offer flu vaccinations. There are a variety of options, including a nasal spray option, and a higher dose version for older adults. No matter which option you choose, the most important thing is to make sure you and your loved ones are all vaccinated, as this is the best way to prevent getting the flu and complications from the flu.

In addition to getting vaccinated, you can take everyday preventive actions like staying away from people who are ill, washing your hands often, and coughing or sneezing into your elbow or sleeve to reduce the spread of germs. Importantly, if you are feeling ill, stay home from work or school to prevent spreading the flu to others. Lastly, go to your medical provider within the first couple days of being ill to get anti-flu prescription medicine (such as Tamiflu); this is important for people with certain medical conditions and to shorten the duration and severity of illness.

Let's all work together to make this flu season as healthy and safe as possible for everyone. For more information please visit www.flu.gov and <http://ow.ly/UTUzP>.