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INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC HITS GUAM

Based on the most recent available data from cooperating medical laboratories, the Department of Public Health and Social Services (DPHSS) is declaring the onset of a Type A influenza epidemic on Guam. This is not entirely unexpected as Guam frequently experiences an increase of influenza illnesses soon after the start of each new school year.

What is Influenza (Flu)?

The flu is a very contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death, especially in persons who have chronic disease problems.

Signs and Symptoms of the Flu

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (feeling very tired)
- Vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children)

How Flu Spread

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or nose.

What should I do to protect myself and my family from the flu

The best way to prevent the flu is by getting the flu vaccine each year. Equally important is to take everyday precautions such as staying away from people who are sick, washing hands frequently to reduce the spread of germs, using disposable tissue to cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing, and coughing into your elbow area. If you have flu symptoms, you should stay home from work or school to prevent spreading the flu to others.


Who should receive the flu vaccine

Because the flu viruses circulating in the community frequently change, everyone should get their annual flu shot as soon as it is available. This is especially important for persons at high risk of developing serious flu-related complications including:

- Children younger than two years of age
- Adults 65 and older
- Pregnant women
- Cancer patients
- Individuals with certain medical conditions such as diabetes, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease, kidney or liver disorders
- Individuals residing in long term care facilities
- Individuals with weakened immune systems (i.e. HIV or AIDS).

REMEMBER that the power to stop the flu starts with you!

For more information, speak with your primary health care provider, visit www.cdc.gov/flu, or call the DPHSS Immunization Program at 735-7143.


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