



## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**October 15, 2018**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:** Doug Bolnick, Public Information Officer, 636-949-7408

### **ANNUAL VACCINATION BUILDS IMMUNITY AGAINST INFLUENZA**

**ST. CHARLES COUNTY, MO** – The last flu season posted record-breaking numbers. More than 8,600 cases of influenza were reported in St. Charles County during the 2017-2018 flu season. Across the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that 900,000 hospitalizations and 80,000 deaths were caused by influenza.

While there is no way to predict the severity of influenza activity in the coming months, there are ways to protect against catching and spreading the highly contagious illness. The St. Charles County Department of Public Health recommends:

1. All individuals 6 months of age or older receive a flu vaccination within the next six weeks.
2. Washing hands and surfaces regularly with soap and clean water or using sanitizer.
3. Covering mouths when coughing or sneezing.
4. Receiving medical care immediately after noticing flu symptoms and following doctor recommendations.
5. That individuals who are sick should stay home until their fever is gone for at least 24 hours.

“Vaccination is the most effective first step in building immunity against the influenza virus,” Division of Health Services Director Sara Evers says. “Our Immunization Clinic offers two types of shots — the quadrivalent vaccination and a high-dose vaccination. While flu activity in St. Charles County last season was more than double our previous highest total, it’s important to point out that more than 40 percent of the reported cases involved someone who was not vaccinated.”

#### **Why Get Vaccinated?**

Annual flu vaccination provides the best opportunity to strengthen a person’s immune system. Those who get vaccinated:

- Decrease their risk for developing the flu.
- Have less severe symptoms and a reduced risk for hospitalization if they do become infected.
- Reduce the risk of illness for those unable to receive vaccinations.

It takes approximately two weeks for flu vaccine antibodies to develop, so a shot received this month can begin protection before the number of influenza cases in our area grows.

#### **How Can Individuals Receive Vaccinations?**

The Department of Public Health’s Immunization Clinic offers two types of flu shots this season, including:

- [Quadrivalent Influenza vaccination](#) – This vaccination is designed to protect against the four most prevalent viruses in circulation: an H1N1 virus, an H3Ns virus and two influenza B viruses. It is deemed appropriate for all individuals ages 6 months or older. Cost is \$36.
- [High-Dose Influenza vaccination](#) – This vaccination is designed for those age 65 or older. It contains four times the amount of antigen in the regular quadrivalent shot to boost the body’s ability to create antibodies against the illness. Cost is \$66.

Services through the Immunization Clinic are payable by cash, check or credit card (includes a service fee). For those with private insurance, the Immunization Clinic can bill providers, although the clinic may be considered out-of-network. Additionally, those qualifying for the Vaccines for Children can obtain flu vaccination at no cost.

The Immunization Clinic is open by appointment from 8:30 to 11 a.m. and 1:30 to 4 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. A limited number of walk-in clients are accepted from 8:30 to 11 a.m. and 1:30 to 4 p.m. on Tuesdays. To make an appointment, please call 636-949-1857.

**(MORE)**

## **(Preventing Influenza – page 2)**

### **What is the Best Way to Wash Hands and Cover Mouths?**

Regular hand washing with soap and clean, running water will help prevent the spread of illnesses like influenza. To ensure proper procedure:

1. Wet hands first and apply soap.
2. Scrub hands together for at least 20 seconds and rinse completely with water.
3. Dry hands thoroughly with a paper towel or air dryer.
4. If you do not have access to soap and water, sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol is effective as well.

Studies show that the flu virus can live and infect individuals for up to 48 hours after being deposited on a surface. Routinely clean commonly touched items like doorknobs, computer keyboards and phones with soap or sanitizer to remove germs. Read the product label to ensure that the item is proven to be effective in stopping the influenza virus.

Those infected with influenza virus can spread it to others up to about six feet away, and individuals can spread the virus even when they do not show symptoms. To keep the flu from spreading, individuals should cover mouths and noses with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. A second option for individuals is to sneeze or cough into the crook of a shirt sleeve. After using, dispose of the soiled tissue or wash the garment. Wash hands or use sanitizer after tossing the tissue.

### **What Treatment is Available?**

For those who become sick with the flu, antiviral drugs are a treatment option. These medications are not sold over-the-counter and must be prescribed by a health care provider after an individual tests positive for influenza. If received within 48 hours of initial flu symptoms, these drugs can lessen symptoms and shorten the length of the illness. These prescription medications also reduce the risk for additional complications and help those at high risk for serious flu complications.

### **What is the Benefit of Staying Home?**

A final prevention technique is to stay home when experiencing flu-like symptoms, such as fever, body aches, runny nose, cough and general fatigue. Individuals may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five to seven days after becoming sick. To fight the spread of influenza, avoid contact with others until at least 24 hours after a fever subsides.

### **How Should Positive Influenza Cases be Reported?**

Preventing the flu is a community-wide effort. Along with individuals taking steps to prevent the spread, medical providers and community partners report incidences of positive cases each week to the health department to help track the illness in our county. Throughout flu season, St. Charles County healthcare providers should fax their instances of positive cases to 636-949-7414. The Division of Health Services compiles this information and issues a weekly report on the number of diagnosed cases. This report may be viewed online at [sccmo.org/health](https://www.sccmo.org/health).

### **Additional Help**

For more information and tips on preventing the flu, please call the Division of Health Services at 636-949-7400 or visit:

- <https://www.sccmo.org/flu>
- <https://health.mo.gov/living/healthcondiseases/communicable/influenza/index.php>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

-end-

### **About the St. Charles County Division of Health Services**

*The Division of Health Services' mission is to promote healthy choices and improve the health of the community. To achieve these goals, program services include an Immunization Clinic for children and adults; nutrition education and supplemental food services for women, infants and children; chronic disease screening and prevention; Communicable Disease reporting and investigation; educational programming; the collection and distribution of birth and death certificates; assistance in applications for U.S. passports; and more. For information on programs offered, visit [sccmo.org/HealthServices](https://www.sccmo.org/HealthServices) or call 636-949-7400.*