

**January 11, 2013**

**Media contact:** Susan Wickstrom; 971-673-0892; [susan.d.wickstrom@state.or.us](mailto:susan.d.wickstrom@state.or.us)

## **Flu remains moderate in Oregon – state officials would like to keep it that way**

### ***Flu vaccine today will reduce risk of catching flu and minimize symptoms***

While the rate of Oregonians reporting flu-like symptoms is on the rise, heralding an early start to the 2012-2013 flu season, state health officials say this year's flu activity level remains moderate across the state, and effective vaccine is available.

Statewide, 2.8 percent of outpatient visits were for flu symptoms, infectious disease experts in the Oregon Health Authority's Public Health Division are reporting. Symptoms include fever of more than 100 degrees, plus cough or sore throat. When the percentage tops 1.5 percent of visits, flu season has started.

Looking at Portland tri-county sentinel information, there have been 65 hospitalizations in the metro area attributed to the virus since Oct. 1, 2012. Most of the flu has been seasonal type A, which matches this year's vaccine. The elderly have been hit the hardest so far this year; 46 percent of those hospitalized were 65 and older.

There have been 20 pediatric deaths attributed to the flu this season around the country, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but none in Oregon. The Public Health Division does not usually track adult flu deaths, except in the case of a pandemic, but it is currently in contact with counties to assess the situation.

(more)

“While we are seeing some uptick of flu, particularly H3N2, we are not seeing the rates that other states, particularly those on the East Coast and in the South, are experiencing,” said Richard Leman, M.D., public health physician in the division’s Acute and Communicable Disease Prevention Section. “We can make sure things don’t get worse by taking action now. People can protect themselves and their families by getting vaccinated and washing their hands regularly.”

Oregon’s 2012-2013 rate of influenza-like illness hasn’t approached that of 2009’s H1N1 pandemic, which reached about 10 percent of outpatient visits in Oregon, but much of the 2012-2013 season is still to come.

So far, flu vaccine manufacturers have shipped more than 1.1 million doses to Oregon during the 2012-2013 flu season. More than 700,000 doses have been administered, according to data reported to Oregon’s ALERT Immunization Information System, but many more have likely been given and not yet reported.

“People can still get their flu vaccination if they haven’t done so already, and we encourage everyone to do so to protect themselves, their friends, family members, and co-workers. It’s not too late,” said Leman. It is estimated that less than half of Oregon’s population has been vaccinated.

The vaccine also is reported to be a good match for the flu viruses that are circulating so far this year: More than 90 percent of viruses tested so far match the vaccine strains.

(more)

“This tells us that this year’s vaccine is pretty effective against the majority of virus strains out there,” Leman said. While there’s no guarantee those who get vaccinated won’t get the flu, they dramatically reduce their risk of getting the flu and spreading it to others if they’ve been immunized.

There are other prevention steps Oregonians can take to reduce the spread of the virus:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your arm when you cough or sneeze, and throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home if you become sick.
- Clean work and household surfaces often.
- Wear a mask if you have a weakened immune system.
- Ask your family, friends and health providers to get a flu vaccination.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Exercise and eat well.
- Manage any chronic conditions.
- Call your doctor to see if you should be seen in the clinic, or if a prescription for anti-viral medication is needed.

(more)

Severe flu symptoms needing an emergency room visit:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen.
- Sudden dizziness.
- Confusion.
- Severe or persistent vomiting.
- Flu-like symptoms that improve, but then return with fever and worse.

For more information about flu prevention, visit [flu.oregon.gov](http://flu.oregon.gov); to find a flu vaccination site near you, call SafeNet at 211.

# # #