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Flu hits elderly, the young the hardest

JOHNSON COUNTY, KANSAS (Jan. 8, 2015) – As flu continues to expand its reach across the United States, it's hitting the elderly and young children the hardest, including those in Johnson County, Kan.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported this week that influenza-associated hospitalization rates are highest among adults age 65 and older, followed by children age 0-4. Nationwide, a total of 21 influenza-associated pediatric deaths have been reported to the CDC as of Dec. 27, including one in Kansas.

Johnson County's flu numbers reflect what's going on nationally. As of Jan. 6, 44 percent of the county's flu cases, as reported from surveillance in the county, are among children age 0-17 years; 21 percent are adults age 18-49; 9 percent are adults age 50-64; and 27 percent are adults over age 65. Influenza A is responsible for nearly 93 percent of the flu cases in the county. These numbers represent only a sample of the flu cases in Johnson County as healthcare providers are not required to report flu illness in Kansas.

Now that flu is widespread in Kansas, Lougene Marsh, director of the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment, says that Johnson County's oldest and youngest citizens are most at risk for serious complications from influenza, including death.

"The elderly and young children, as well as those with chronic medical conditions and weakened immune systems are particularly vulnerable to the strain that is causing most of the hospitalizations and deaths this year," says Marsh. "Keep an eye on family members, friends and neighbors who may be at risk and encourage them to contact their healthcare provider at the first sign of flu symptoms to see if antiviral medications would be appropriate."

Flu-like symptoms include: fever, cough, muscle/body aches, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and fatigue. Marsh says antiviral medications are most effective when treatment begins within the first 48 hours of flu symptoms. It can mean the difference between having a milder illness instead of very serious illness that could result in a hospital stay or even death, says Marsh.

Marsh stresses that anyone who has not gotten vaccinated yet this season should do so now. This includes people who may already have gotten the flu this season because flu vaccines protect against three or four different viruses and it's possible that other viruses will circulate later in the season.

(more)

Flu shots are widely available at retail pharmacies, physicians' offices, urgent care centers and the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment's Olathe (11875 S. Sunset Drive) and Mission (6000 Lamar Ave.) walk-in clinics. Go to www.flu.gov to find a vaccine provider near you.

Washing your hands often with soap and water, covering your coughs and sneezes and staying away from people who are sick are other good ways to reduce your chances of getting all sorts of illness, including the flu, adds Marsh.

If you do become ill, citizens are advised to stay home from school or work until they are fever-free for 24 hours.

More information about influenza, symptoms and prevention tips can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>

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About Johnson County, Kansas

Located in the southwestern quadrant of the Kansas City Metropolitan Region, Johnson County, Kansas is a community of choice with a current population of more than 560,000, making it the most populated of the 105 counties in Kansas, but traditionally having the lowest mill levy in the state. For more information visit the county's website at www.jocogov.org.