

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

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Second influenza-related death in Kitsap County confirmed

Kitsap Public Health District stressing the importance of flu shots

Kitsap County, WA --- The Kitsap Public Health District is stressing the importance of flu shots and prevention strategies after the second influenza-related death this flu season was confirmed this week.

Kitsap Public Health was notified this week about an influenza-related death in an otherwise healthy school-aged child. In November, Kitsap Public Health received confirmation that an adult had died of complications from influenza.

"Our hearts go out to the families of these individuals," said Dr. Susan Turner, Health Officer for the Kitsap County Health District. "These tragedies remind us that influenza can be a very serious illness, especially in young children."

This is the first pediatric death from influenza in Kitsap County since 2009, but it is important for parents to understand that influenza ("the flu") can be very serious for children – even otherwise healthy children. Children five years or younger, especially those under age 2, are at higher risk for complications. Others at higher risk include adults age 65 or older and pregnant woman, as well as individuals with chronic health problems.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get a seasonal flu vaccination. Some children ages 6-months to 8 years of age require two doses of influenza vaccine.

"Having your children and yourselves vaccinated is the best way you can protect your children from the flu," added Dr. Turner. In addition to vaccinations, it is important for everyone to be consistent about these three critical prevention strategies: wash your hands frequently, cover your coughs and sneezes with your sleeve or a tissue (not your hands), and stay home when you are ill until you have had no fever (without medication) for 24 hours.

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According to the CDC, children commonly need medical care because of influenza, especially before they turn 5 years old. Severe influenza complications are most common in children younger than 2 years old. Children with chronic health problems like asthma, diabetes and disorders of the brain or nervous system are at especially high risk of developing serious flu complications. Each year an average of 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized because of influenza complications. Flu seasons vary in severity, however some children die from flu each year. During the last influenza season, more than 140 flu-related pediatric deaths were reported in the United States.

Until last week, Kitsap County had seen very minimal influenza activity. However, preliminary data now show that Kitsap County is seeing an increase in influenza – predominantly influenza B, but some influenza A is also circulating. Last week, the Washington State Department of Health also reported that flu was beginning to increase, and there have been eight lab-confirmed influenza deaths in Washington this flu season.

When someone becomes ill, they should drink plenty of fluids, take fever-reducing medication (avoid aspirin in children), and call their health care provider if symptoms become worse. A healthcare provider can prescribe antiviral medications that can reduce the severity of the illness, but they are most effective when taken within 1 or 2 days of the beginning of flu symptoms.

People should seek urgent medical care if the following signs of serious illness are present:

For Children:

- Any fever in a baby 2-months-old or less
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

For Adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

Resources:

- Washington State Department of Health “Flu News” page which includes the Flu Vaccine Finder tool: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/Flu>
- The Centers’ For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Resources:
 - Flu Basics: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/index.htm>
 - 2015-16 Flu Season Information & Updates: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/upcoming.htm>
 - Flu prevention information & resources: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/consumer/prevention.htm>
- American Academy of Pediatrics Flu Information for parents: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/the-flu-seasonal-influenza-2014-2015.aspx>
- Kitsap Public Health District’s weekly respiratory illness report is available on the District’s website: www.kitsappublichealth.org

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