



Caddo County Health Department

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Influenza and RSV Update**

As the number of flu-related hospitalizations continues to increase, the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) reminds Oklahomans there is still time to get a flu shot.

OSDH reports eight deaths and more than 400 hospitalizations and 8 deaths associated with the flu since the season began in September. More than half of the hospitalizations and all but one of the deaths have occurred among individuals 50 years and older.

Flu vaccinations are still available at county health departments, medical providers and pharmacies throughout the state. The OSDH wants to remind Oklahomans that everyone is at risk for influenza and the flu vaccination is recommended for anyone 6 months of age and older. Clinics at county health departments are stocked with regular flu vaccine and high-dose vaccine for those over the age of 65.

Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk for serious illness from the flu including pregnant women, children younger than 5 years of age and people with asthma, diabetes, chronic heart and lung disease and other chronic conditions. Parents and family members of babies younger than 6 months of age and people who live with or care for anyone at high risk for complications from the flu, including health care workers, should also get the vaccine.

In addition to flu, the number of positive Viral Respiratory Illness (RSV) tests are higher than in years past. RSV season starts during the late fall or winter and continues into the spring much like the flu. RSV causes a respiratory illness commonly affecting young children. Anyone can get RSV but infection is most commonly found in children less than two years of age. It is the number one cause of pneumonia and lower respiratory infections in children under the age of 1 and a substantial cause of illness as well as death in older adults. Notably, most children will have had RSV by age two.

The virus is transmitted through nose and throat secretions, either by direct contact or through air particles from coughs and sneezes. Less often, people get RSV from an infected person that does not wash their hands or use an alcohol-based-hand gel with at least 60% alcohol after coughing or sneezing into them. In this way, the virus can be transferred from an infected person's hands by shaking hands or touching contaminated surfaces and a healthy person touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

The first symptoms of RSV include fever, runny nose, cough, and occasionally wheezing. Less common symptoms are chills, headache, general aching, fatigue, or lack of appetite. For children with mild disease, no specific treatment is necessary other than alleviation of symptoms. Children with severe disease may require oxygen therapy and mechanical ventilation. An antiviral aerosol may be used in the treatment of patients with severe disease. Generally when adults are infected with RSV, the infection either produces mild, cold-like symptoms, or no symptoms at all. For the very young, the elderly, and people with chronic



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conditions, symptoms can be more severe and including wheezing, shortness of breath, pneumonia and sometimes death.

How to prevent exposure to RSV and flu:

Good hygiene habits prevent and reduce the transmission of RSV such as:

- Covering your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when sneezing or coughing,
- Disposing of tissues properly,
- Washing hands frequently, and
- Using alcohol-based hand sanitizers if hands are not visibly soiled.

When sick with a fever and cough:

- Stay home from work, school, church, or other daily activities outside of the home,
- Avoid other crowded areas or events like shopping malls or sports arenas,
- Do not visit nursing homes, hospitals, or other long-term care facilities, and
- Do not visit people at increased risk for severe complications.

Visit the OK Flu View at <http://flu.health.ok.gov> for weekly Oklahoma flu and RSV updates and additional information about the flu, or contact the Caddo County Health Department at 405-247-2507.

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