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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **STAY HEALTHY THIS FLU SEASON -- GET A FLU SHOT**

**(SANTA BARBARA, Calif.)** -- Influenza, commonly called "the flu," is caused by the influenza virus, which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs). Unlike many other viral respiratory infections, such as the common cold, the flu can cause severe illness and life-threatening complications in many people. Significant flu activity can begin as early as October, last as late as May, and typically peaks in February.

Every year, flu spreads across the country, from person to person, family to family, and community to community. The severity of flu illness can vary from mild to severe. When severe, flu complications can lead to hospitalization and sometimes even death. Even healthy children and adults can get very sick from the flu. Each year in the United States on average: An estimated 5-20 percent of the population can be infected with the flu, and more than 200,000 people may be hospitalized during a flu season.

An annual flu vaccination is the best way to prevent the flu and the flu-related complications that could lead to hospitalization, and at times can lead to death. Health experts across the country recommend that everyone 6 months and older, including pregnant women, get a flu vaccine. Yearly flu vaccination should begin as soon as vaccine is available, and should continue throughout the flu season which can last as late as May.

Getting a flu vaccine is more convenient than ever before. Vaccines are available from your doctor and at many retail pharmacies. Many employers, schools, colleges and universities also offer flu vaccines. So when you're out and about in your community and see signs offering flu shots, or when you visit your doctor for a routine check-up, remember: the flu vaccine is the single best way to prevent the flu. You can also find a flu vaccination clinic near you with the vaccine finder at <http://vaccine.healthmap.org/>.

Flu shots are covered by Medi-Cal, Medicare and by most insurance plans. Please check with your insurance provider for coverage details.