



PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT
300 N. San Antonio Road • Santa Barbara, CA 93110
(805) 681-5102 • FAX (805) 681-5191
www.countyofsb.org

PRESS RELEASE

January 8, 2018

News Media Contact:

Susan Klein-Rothschild, MSW
Deputy Director
(805) 681-5435
(805) 896-1057 (cell)
sklein@sbcphd.org

INFLUENZA DEATHS AND PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE

(SANTA BARBARA, Calif.) – The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department confirms there were 6 deaths from influenza in the past two weeks within Santa Barbara County. All 6 individuals were over age 65. This number is significantly higher than the number of deaths typically recorded during previous influenza seasons. By comparison, there were 3 deaths recorded for all age groups for the entire flu season last year.

The number of positive influenza tests continues to be significantly higher than past years both across the state and in our county. The predominant strain so far this season is H3N2 which causes more severe disease, more hospitalizations, and more deaths.

Dr. Charity Dean, Santa Barbara County Public Health Officer, said “The current numbers exceed where we were at this time during the 2009-10 H1N1 pandemic. What we are seeing is unprecedented compared to the last 10 years of influenza seasons.”

Due to high demands on the healthcare system and in particular Emergency Medical Services (hospitals and ambulances), Public Health is issuing the following guidance:

When To Seek Medical Care

- For most otherwise healthy individuals it is best to recover at home. Rest, stay hydrated, and avoid contact with others.
- If seeking medical care for non-life threatening symptoms, people are encouraged to see their primary care provider, an outpatient clinic, or outpatient urgent care.
- The Emergency Medical Services, including hospitals and ambulances, are resources for people who need immediate treatment for potentially life-threatening conditions. As hospitals and emergency rooms across the county are near capacity with severely ill people, it is important to avoid using emergency services for routine influenza cases that are not life-threatening.
- Certain groups are at a higher risk of serious complications from influenza: those age 65 and over, children age 5 and under, pregnant women, and those with underlying health conditions. These groups should remain alert and seek treatment early from their primary care provider.

Follow us on **Twitter:** @SBCPublicHealth **Facebook:** Santa Barbara County Public Health Department

- **Seek emergency medical care for children with any of the following:**
 - Fast breathing or trouble breathing
 - Difficulty breathing or chest pain
 - Not drinking enough liquids
 - Severe or persistent vomiting
 - 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
- **In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention are:**
 - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
 - Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
 - Sudden dizziness
 - Confusion
 - Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

What To Do If You Develop Flu Symptoms

If you or a family member get symptoms similar to the seasonal flu, (fever, cough, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue), the following steps should be taken:

- **Avoid Contact with Others** – Stay home and stay away from others as much as possible. Do not travel or go to work for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine and you feel capable of doing usual routines.
- **Recover at home** – Get plenty of rest and drink clear liquids. Most individuals will recover at home without needing medical care. If you have severe illness or are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health provider.
- **Wear a face mask** – When it is necessary to leave your home to go to the doctor's office or when in common space shared with others, wear a face mask to decrease the spread of the virus to others.
- **Cover your nose and mouth** – When you cough or sneeze, cover with a tissue, and throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If a tissue isn't available, cough or sneeze into your shoulder or your elbow.
- **Wash your hands** – Wash often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol based hand cleaners are also effective.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** - Germs spread this way.

How to Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones

- Everyone age 6 months and over should get the flu vaccine. Being vaccinated not only protects you, but those around you who might be particularly vulnerable to serious complications from the flu.
- Wash hands with soap and water, especially after direct contact with others and before eating.
- Avoid touching mouth, nose and eyes unless hands are recently washed or hand sanitizer is used.
- Avoid sick people and stay home if you are sick.

For more information, see www.cdc.gov/flu.