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Don't Delay Getting the Flu Shot

PENSACOLA – The Escambia County Health Department urges residents to avoid delay in getting their annual flu shot. Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness and sometimes can lead to death.

The 2011-2012 flu vaccine protects against infection caused by influenza A viruses, including H1N1 as well as an influenza B virus. Everyone six months and older should get a flu vaccination, especially young children, pregnant women, caregivers for infants under 6 months of age, people aged 65 and older, and those of any age with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart or lung disease.

The best way to prevent the flu is by washing your hands often, avoiding areas where many people are ill, staying physically active and healthy, and getting the flu vaccination every year. Individuals can spread the flu to others before they even know they are sick. The most effective ways to avoid spreading the flu are by covering coughs and sneezes with the elbow rather than the hand, and staying home when sick.

Health officials advise that individuals who are at risk of complications from influenza should contact their physician immediately if flu symptoms appear. Symptoms may include cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and fever. However, it is possible to have the flu without having a fever. Some people also may have diarrhea and vomiting.

Flu season may begin in early October and can last until May, although it usually peaks in January and February of each year in Escambia County. The shot takes two weeks to become fully effective, so plan ahead, and get your flu shot without delay. Flu shots are available at many physicians' offices, clinics, and local pharmacies. The Escambia County Health Department (ECHD) offers adult flu shots for a fee of \$28 and vaccinations at no charge for qualifying children through 18 years of age. Medicare Part B is also accepted. For ECHD appointment information, visit escambiahealth.com or call 850.595.6554.

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