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Flu season has arrived Warm weather no protection against flu virus Not too late for a flu shot

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAN FRANCISCO (January 16, 2015) – Bay Area Health Officers are seeing increased flu activity and encourage all residents to get flu shots and to wash their hands.

Though the flu season has been relatively mild in the Bay Area so far this year, that could change. Flu is widespread in 46 states throughout the country. Locally, cases are increasing, and everyone can play a part to prevent its spread.

“Although Ebola has gotten a lot of attention this year, flu is a much more real threat here in the Bay Area,” said Dr. Tomás Aragón, San Francisco Health Officer. “Every year, flu sickens and kills thousands of Americans and is particularly dangerous to the young, elderly and those with chronic illnesses or weakened immune systems.”

Last week, the California Department of Public Health announced the state’s first flu death, in southern California. The Bay Area has seen four flu deaths, in adult residents of San Francisco (1), Sonoma (1) and San Mateo (2) counties, confirmed this week. Flu deaths in people under age 65 are reported to the state.

So far this season, influenza A H3N2 viruses have been most common. For comparison, in the 2012-2013, 2007-2008, and 2003-2004 seasons H3N2 strains predominated and had the highest seasonal mortality levels of the past decade. About half of this year’s H3N2 viruses that have been analyzed show changes that may make this year’s flu shot less effective at protecting against this particular strain.

Depending on the formulation, flu vaccines protect against three or four different flu viruses. Even during a season when the vaccine is only partially protective against one flu virus, it can protect against the others.

“Even though the flu shot is not a perfect match for all of this year’s flu viruses, it is still worth getting,” Aragón said. “The shot will still protect against other strains of flu that are circulating, and can prevent the severity of flu if you do get sick.”

In addition to getting vaccinated, it's important to practice good hand washing and health habits. People who are ill can help stop the spread of germs:

- Limit contact with others – stay home from work or school
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based rub
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth

Flu vaccination is recommended for everyone six months of age or older, but is particularly important for those at higher risk of severe influenza, including pregnant women, children under five years of age, the elderly, and persons with certain underlying medical conditions such as diabetes, obesity, asthma and heart disease. Vaccination of pregnant women also helps to protect infants too young to be vaccinated.

This flu season can still become severe. Those at highest risk who show flu symptoms should contact their physician immediately in order to get the most effective treatment. Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches and fatigue.

Visit a [flu vaccine location near you](#) to get immunized. For more information about influenza, visit www.flu.gov.

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