



Kiowa County Health Department

### **For Immediate Release**

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### **OSDH Reports an Increase in Flu Cases; Vaccinations Encouraged**

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

OSDH reports a total of 23 deaths and 827 hospitalizations associated with the flu since the season began in September. More than half of hospitalizations have occurred among individuals 65 years and older.

Public health influenza vaccination clinics are available at county health departments, medical providers and retailers throughout the state. 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.

Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk for serious illness from 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. It is important for those experiencing flu-like symptoms to consult with a provider as soon as possible. A provider may prescribe antiviral drugs to treat the flu. These drugs work better for treatment when started within 48 hours of noticing symptoms. Antiviral drugs may be indicated as a prevention measure to prevent especially vulnerable persons such as infants less than 6 months old, or persons of any age with a medical condition which severely suppresses their immune system.

In addition to getting a flu shot, public health officials recommend the following prevention tips:

- Frequent hand washing using soap and water, or alcohol-based products such as hand gels when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Make “respiratory hygiene” a habit, including use of tissues to cover coughs and sneezes, then disposing of them and washing hands at once. When tissues are not readily available, use your sleeve, never your hands.
- Stay home from work, school and other public places when a person is ill.

Visit the OK Flu View at <http://flu.health.ok.gov> for weekly Oklahoma flu updates or contact the Kiowa County Health Department for additional information about the flu at 580-726-3316.

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