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Early Data Suggests Potentially Severe Flu Season

EAU CLAIRE- December 8, 2014 – Early data suggests that the current 2014-2015 flu season could be severe. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urges immediate vaccination for anyone still unvaccinated this season and recommends prompt treatment with antiviral drugs for people at high risk of complications who develop flu.

So far this year, seasonal influenza A H3N2 viruses have been most common. Often more severe flu illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths occur during seasons when H3N2 viruses predominate.

This year's influenza vaccination does contain the influenza A H3N2 virus component. However, increasing the risk of a severe flu season is the finding that approximately 50% the H3N2 viruses detected so far this year have proven to be a variant of the H3N2 component in the vaccine. This means the vaccine's ability to protect against H3N2 viruses may be reduced. Even so, vaccination is strongly recommended. Vaccinated people may have a milder illness, including less severe outcomes such as hospitalizations and death, if they do become infected with the H3N2 virus. Also, flu vaccination will protect against the other types of influenza strains that are currently circulating at lower levels in our communities and may become more common later in the season.

“If you haven't already, get your flu shot now,” urges Lieske Giese, Director of the Eau Claire City-County Health Department. “In addition to the complications the H3N2 virus presents, the flu season is approximately 2 weeks ahead of schedule. Wisconsin is already seeing above average flu activity and we expect it to peak around the first of the year.”

Flu shots are available at many clinics and pharmacies throughout the community. Visit www.ehealthdepartment.org for a list of the clinic dates and times at the Eau Claire City-County Health Department.

CDC recommends that people at high risk check with their doctor or other health care professional promptly if they get flu symptoms. Studies show that flu antiviral drugs work best for treatment when they are started in the first 48 hours after symptoms appear. Flu symptoms can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.

Those at higher risk for serious complications from getting influenza include children younger than 5 years (especially those younger than 2 years); adults 65 years and older; pregnant women; and people with certain chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease, and kidney disease.

More information on the influenza can be found at the Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/flu/

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