

January 2016

Dear Parents:

The Florida Department of Health reports that influenza and influenza-like illness activity is increasing across the state. Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. Serious outcomes of flu infection can result in hospitalization or death. Some people, such as young children, older people, and people with certain health conditions are at high risk for serious flu complications. The Department is encouraging families to get their flu vaccines now. Vaccination is most crucial for children with underlying health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease.

Vaccination is the best way to protect against the flu and severe complications from the flu. The flu vaccine is offered by physicians, pharmacies, and the Florida Department of Health, Collier County. Contact your physician, county health department, or visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/prevention/flu-prevention/locate-a-flu-shot.html> to find a flu vaccine center near you.

The flu vaccine is safe. The national Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that all individuals six months of age and older receive the flu vaccine each year. Since infants younger than 6 months of age are too young to get vaccinated against influenza, it is important that family members (including pregnant mothers or breastfeeding mothers) and other caregivers for these children be vaccinated to help protect them from the disease.

In the unfortunate event that your child does become sick with flu-like symptoms, please seek care from your healthcare professional quickly – that is, soon after the onset of flu-like symptoms. Symptoms may include headache, fever, severe cough, runny nose or body aches. Flu antiviral medications have been shown to reduce severity and length of disease, decrease the risk of complications from influenza, and reduce the risk of death among hospitalized patients.

It is especially important that parents **keep sick children at home** to prevent spreading the flu to others. Additional flu prevention steps include keeping your hands away from your face and sneezing or coughing into a tissue or your elbow.

The best way to keep yourself and your family safe and healthy during flu season is to: 1) Get vaccinated, 2) See your doctor if experiencing flu-like symptoms, and 3) Keep sick family members at home and follow guidance on treatment.

For more information please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/parents/index.htm>.

Sincerely,