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FLORIDA SURGEON GENERAL URGES VACCINATION AS BEST DEFENSE AGAINST RAPIDLY SPREADING FLU VIRUS

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Health departments in the Tampa Bay region—Citrus, Hardee, Hernando, Highlands, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk and Sarasota—are strongly encouraging residents older than six months of age to follow the Florida Department of Health’s recommendation that all unvaccinated residents get their flu shot as soon as possible. Flu vaccination is the best way to prevent the flu and its potentially serious complications.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) estimates that, nationwide, for the 2019-2020 season so far, there have been at least 6.4 million cases of influenza, more than 55,000 associated hospitalizations and approximately 2,900 related deaths. For Florida flu statistics, please visit the Department’s [Florida Flu Review](#) website.

“With this year’s flu season in full swing, it is critical that adults and children get the flu vaccine to protect against infection and help prevent the spread of seasonal flu to others”, said Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez. “By getting a flu shot now, you will protect yourself, as well as your family and friends.”

“Influenza is a contagious virus that can spread rapidly in our communities and cause severe illness resulting in hospitalization or death”, said Florida Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees. “Getting vaccinated is the best way to avoid the flu; it reduces the spread of the virus and can also help make illnesses less severe for those who do still get sick.”

Get the Flu Shot

The vaccine is recommended for everyone six months and older, including pregnant women. Individuals that are at most risk for getting severely ill from the flu are young children, pregnant women, people with certain chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease or lung disease, and people aged 65 years and older.

It takes approximately two weeks after vaccination for your body to develop protection against the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend getting a flu vaccine every year because flu viruses evolve quickly, and last year’s vaccine may not protect against

the current year's strain. Even if the vaccine does not fully protect against the flu, it may reduce the severity of symptoms and the risk of complications.

Where to Get the Flu Shot

Each of the Tampa Bay area county health departments and most pharmacies and primary care physician offices offer flu shots. For information about the flu and to find other locations to get the seasonal vaccine, go to www.FluFreeFlorida.com or call your county's health office:

- **Citrus - (352) 527-0068**
- **Hardee - (863) 773-4161**
- **Hernando - (353) 540-6800 (Ages 17 and under only)**
- **Highlands - (863) 386-6040**
- **Hillsborough - (813) 307-8000**
- **Manatee - (941) 748-0747**
- **Pasco - (727) 619-0300**
- **Pinellas - (727) 824-6900**
- **Polk - (863) 519-7900**
- **Sarasota - (941) 861-2900**

Healthy Habits to Help Prevent Flu

Good health habits like washing your hands can help stop the spread of germs and prevent respiratory illnesses like the flu. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

Covering the mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing may prevent those around you from getting sick. Make it a habit to clean and disinfect commonly used surfaces in your home, school or office.

Flu vaccines and good hand hygiene are still the go-to recommendations for prevention; however, public health officials say it's just as important to contain the virus, and that means staying home when you're sick — even if it means missing holiday festivities.

About the Florida Department of Health

The Department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](http://PublicHealthAccreditationBoard.org), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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