



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDS PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES FOR
ADDED PROTECTION AGAINST INFLUENZA**

--Reports of flu like symptoms rise--

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL-The Palm Beach County Health Department announced today it has seen an increase in the number of reported flu like symptoms from area physicians. Because of this increase in symptomatic flu activity in the county and in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Florida Department of Health (DOH) recommendations, health officials are urging residents to take the following precautionary measures to help provide protection against influenza.

"In our county, we face the flu every year," Jean Malecki, M.D., Health Department Director said. "As we begin this year's flu season, it is important all individuals take these precautionary measures to help prevent the spread of the flu and other respiratory illnesses that are common this time of year."

The following simple steps can be taken to help prevent catching and spreading the flu.

Precautionary measures include:

- x Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- x Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- x Do not share eating utensils, drinking glasses, towels or other personal items.
- x Stay home when you are sick and keep sick children home.
- x Avoid close contact with people who are sick, if possible.
- x Avoid crowds and areas where people congregate and are likely to be sneezing and coughing.

Any remaining supply of vaccine should be used to vaccinate Florida's most vulnerable, the high risk individuals.

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High-risk individuals who should be vaccinated against influenza include:

- x Persons 65 years and older;
- x Residents and employees of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities that house persons of any age who have long-term illnesses;
- x Persons 6 months of age and older who have chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma; or need regular medical care; or had to be in a hospital because of metabolic diseases (like diabetes), chronic kidney disease, or weakened immune system (including immune system problems caused by medicine or by infection with HIV/AIDS);
- x Children and teenagers 6 months to 18 years who are on long-term aspirin therapy and therefore could develop Reye syndrome after the flu; and
- x Women who will be more than 3 months pregnant during the flu season.

Health care workers and additional individuals who should be vaccinated include:

- x Doctors, nurses, and other employees in hospitals and doctors' offices, including emergency response workers;
- x People who provide home care to those in high-risk groups; and
- x Household members (including children) of people in high-risk groups.
- x Children aged 6 to 23 months and caregivers of children younger than 6 months are also encouraged to receive flu shots because children younger than 24 months may be at higher risk for complications from influenza.

During the past two weeks, ending December 13, 2003, the sentinel physicians who track patient visits reported 9% of the patients seen had flu like symptoms. This compares to 5.7% in the week ending November 29, 2003.

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This year, Florida Department of Health county health departments received more than 275,000 doses of flu vaccine, an increase of over 40 percent from the number of Floridians vaccinated by DOH last year. In a typical year, 70-75 million Americans receive a flu shot. For more information about influenza and steps to protect individuals and families, visit www.cdc.gov.

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