



**2014-2015 Influenza Key Messages for
Health Care Professionals
December 9, 2014**

Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.com/flu

New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH): www.nj.com/health/flu

Key Messages:

Health officials are beginning to see increased influenza illness in parts of the United States and in New Jersey. While it is impossible to predict how bad the flu season will be, early monitoring suggests that a strain which causes more severe disease, influenza AH3, may become the predominant virus this season. New Jersey is currently seeing moderate levels of influenza activity, which is usual for this time of year and flu activity is expected to increase in the coming weeks.

This year's influenza vaccine may not provide complete protection against all of the circulating strains. When a circulating flu virus is different from vaccine viruses, it is still recommended that persons get a flu shot. Even if the vaccine might not provide complete protection against one of the strains, it still offers protection against the other flu viruses present in the vaccine.

Health care providers should continue to encourage patients to get vaccinated.

Three recommendations to fight flu:

1. Get vaccinated, either by flu shot or nasal spray. Vaccination is an important part of protecting against flu and serious complications
2. Cover coughs and sneezes, stay away from sick people (and stay home if sick) and wash hands often to help stop the spread of viruses, such as flu
3. Treat flu illness to prevent serious complications; ask your healthcare provider about medication (antivirals) as soon as you notice flu symptoms.

NJDOH General Info/Recommendations:

There are many different strains of flu. Certain types of flu viruses cause more serious illness than others. Influenza A (H3N2) viruses are most common this flu season. When this is the case, it is customary to see more illness, hospitalizations and deaths due to flu. Immunization is the best way to protect against the seasonal influenza virus.

The flu vaccination is recommended for anyone six months of age and older. Vaccination is important for people at high risk for flu-related complications. This includes infants, pregnant women, kids and adults with chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease, and older adults. It is also important for persons who live with or provide care for persons at high risk for complications get vaccinated.

The NJDOH recommends that health care providers continue to recommend influenza vaccination to all persons six months of age and older.

Children who are 6 through 59 months of age and attend licensed childcare/preschool facilities in New Jersey are required to receive a dose of influenza vaccine prior to December 31 each year. A child who is not vaccinated by December 31 will be excluded from childcare/preschool until he/she turns 60 months of age, he/she receives one dose of the vaccine, or until the end of flu season (April 1).

Clinicians should not wait for lab tests to treat patients when they are exhibiting symptoms of flu. Prescribing antiviral treatment early after symptoms appear may help to reduce the risk of a serious complication or hospitalization. Prescription antivirals are under-prescribed for high risk people who get the flu.

Two approved drugs are recommended for use in the United States for the 2014-2015 flu season: oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza).