



MEDIA RELEASE

Bureau of Administration
7178 Columbia Gateway Drive
Columbia, MD 21046

Media Contacts:

Lisa M. de Hernández
Public Information Officer
(410) 313-6353 Office (410) 428-7294 Mobile
ldehernandez@howardcountymd.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Parents: Fight the Flu and Watch for Warning Signs

Columbia, MD – As a result of the death this week of a Howard County teenager due to influenza, the Howard County Health Department is encouraging citizens to take steps to protect against the flu and to know the warning signs that require urgent medical attention.

Deaths among young people from the flu are extremely rare (CDC reports only nine confirmed pediatric influenza deaths in the U.S. this year) but Health Officer, Dr. Peter Beilenson reminds all County residents it is still advisable to get a flu shot and noted that free flu shots are available at the Howard County Health Department by calling 410-313-7500 (or contact your local Health Department).

“This tragic death is highly unusual. Most people who get the flu recover after a few days, but getting a flu shot and following common hygiene precautions can greatly reduce the risk of contracting the flu” says Dr. Beilenson

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following steps to protect yourself from the Flu:

- **Get a Flu Shot!** - It is not too late. New recommendations include giving flu shots to children ages 6 months to 18 years and to continue to immunize adults of all ages.
- **Take preventive actions!** –
 - Cover your sneeze or cough. (Use the crook of your elbow!)
 - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water (anti-bacterial hand cleaners work too).
- **Try to avoid contact with sick people** – Stay home from work or school if you are sick.

Influenza usually starts suddenly and may include the following symptoms:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)

- more -

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- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Diarrhea and vomiting (more common among children than adults)

For the quickest recovery from influenza, get plenty of rest; drink fluids like juice, water, or hot tea; and take acetaminophen or ibuprofen for muscle aches and fever (**never** give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms). **Do not** give any medication including over-the-counter remedies to a child without first consulting with your pediatrician.

There are several emergency warning signs of the flu that require **urgent** medical attention. In **children** they are:

- High or prolonged fever
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Changes in mental status, such as not waking up or not interacting; being so irritable that the child does not want to be held; or seizures
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions (heart or lung disease, diabetes)

For **adults** the signs are:

- High or prolonged fever
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Near-fainting or fainting
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Seek medical care immediately, either by calling your doctor or going to an emergency room, if you or someone you know is experiencing any of the signs described above or other unusually severe symptoms.

For more information about the flu, visit the CDC's website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

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