



Buncombe County Health & Human Services

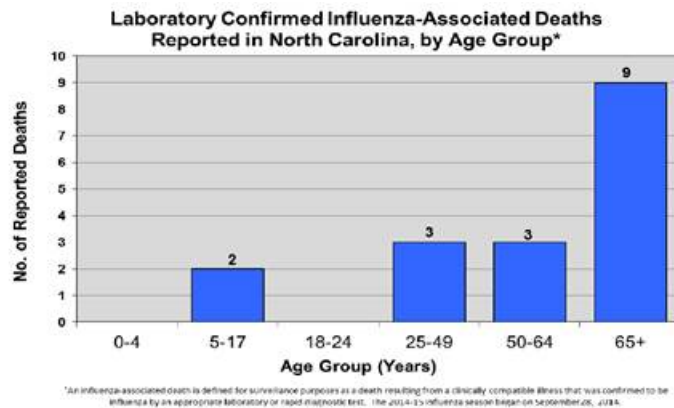
Aging and Veteran's Services ~ Social Work Services
Public Assistance & Work Support Strategies ~ Public Health
Amanda Stone, MSW
Health and Human Services Director

To: Buncombe County Medical Providers
From: Dr. Jennifer Mullendore, Medical Director
Date: Monday, January 5, 2015
RE: Health alert from the Buncombe County Department of Health

Influenza Update and Guidance for NC Providers

As you know, influenza activity has increased over the last month and is widespread in NC and locally.

- As of December 27, 2014, the **total # of flu-associated deaths** reported in NC so far this season is **17**.
 - This includes several elderly Buncombe County residents.
 - Please let your local health department know of any flu-associated deaths as we are required to report them to the NC Division of Public Health.**
 - An influenza-associated death = a clinically-compatible illness confirmed to be influenza by an appropriate test**



- So far, most of the circulating flu virus typed out in NC (and nationwide) continues to be **influenza A (H3N2) virus**.

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HHS Administration p. 828.250.5700 f. 828.250.6235 PO Box 7408 Asheville, NC 28802	Aging & Veteran's Services p. 828.250.5726 PO Box 7408 Asheville, NC 28802	Social Work Services p. 828.250.5500 f. 828.250.6235 PO Box 7408 Asheville, NC 28802	Public Assistance p. 828.250.5500 f. 828.250.6235 PO Box 7408 Asheville, NC 28802	Public Health p. 828.250.5000 f. 828.250.6235 PO Box 7407 Asheville, NC 28802
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- This strain is associated with **more severe illness and mortality** than H1N1- or B- predominant seasons, **especially among older people and young children**.
- Additionally, ~2/3 of H3N2 viruses characterized by CDC so far this season have **not been well matched to the vaccine virus component**, meaning that vaccine effectiveness against these viruses may be reduced.
- Therefore, **the use of influenza antiviral drugs** as a second line of defense against the flu **becomes even more important, especially for persons at high risk for complication and those with severe or progressive illness**.

Prevention and Control Recommendations

- **Continue to offer flu vaccine to all people ≥6 months of age.**
 - Vaccination is particularly important for persons at higher-risk for serious illness, including pregnant/post-partum women, persons <2 or ≥65 years of age, and persons with certain medical conditions.
 - High risk medical conditions include: Asthma; neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions; chronic lung diseases (such as COPD and cystic fibrosis); heart diseases (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease); blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease); endocrine disorders (such as diabetes); kidney disorders; liver disorders; metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders); and weakened immune system due to disease or medication (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or cancer, or those on chronic steroids).
 - While the vaccine may work less well against viruses not well matched to the vaccine, it can still protect many people and prevent flu-related complications, hospitalizations and deaths.
 - **The Buncombe County Health and Human Services continues to have influenza vaccine available, including some no-cost vaccine for uninsured Buncombe County residents who meet certain financial criteria.**
 - **In addition to an assortment of flu vaccine (high-dose, nasal spray, etc.), we also have Flublok[®], a trivalent influenza vaccine that has been FDA approved for use in adults 18 years and older with egg allergies.**
- **Decisions regarding treatment should be based on clinical and epidemiologic information, rather than on test results.**
 - Rapid tests cannot rule out influenza infection. Treatment should not be delayed while awaiting laboratory confirmation.
- **Antiviral treatment is most effective when started within 48 hours of illness onset. However, treatment of persons with prolonged or severe illness can reduce mortality and duration of hospitalization even when started more than 48 hours after onset of illness.**

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- Antiviral treatment is recommended as early as possible for individuals with suspected or confirmed influenza who have any of the following:
 - Illness requiring hospitalization,
 - Progressive, severe, or complicated illness, regardless of previous health status, or
 - Increased risk for severe disease.

This guidance might change as the influenza season progresses. Additional guidance and weekly surveillance updates are available at www.flu.nc.gov.

Let me or the Buncombe County Disease Control staff (828-250-5109) know if you have any questions regarding flu or any other communicable disease issue.

Thanks,

Jenni

Jennifer Mullendore, MD, MSPH
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"Health care is vital to all of us some of the time, but public health is vital to all of us all of the time." --
 Dr. C. Everett Koop, former US Surgeon General

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