

# **News Release**

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## **Flu cases continue on the rise; it's not too late to get a shot**

Usually by this time of the year, flu season is winding down, but that's not the case this year. The Knox County Health Department reports that confirmed cases of influenza have increased significantly during the past few weeks with several hospitalizations.

According to Lisa Dudgeon, RN, communicable disease nurse for the health department, there have been 330 reported cases of influenza in Knox County since the beginning of the flu season last October, with nearly three-fourth of those cases occurring in the past six weeks. During that same time period, there have been 29 people hospitalized, with more than one-third occurring in the past six weeks. The numbers are reported by local healthcare providers including Knox Community Hospital, to the health department.

"It's unusual to see an increase this time of the year," said Adam Masters, epidemiologist for the health department. "Usually, this time of year we see the number of cases starting to drop off." The recent increase in cases locally mirrors what has been happening throughout Ohio and nationally.

H1N1 was the dominant influenza strain early on, but the H3N2 strain has been showing up in testing, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) latest report. Throughout the season, the H1N1 has constituted the majority (67.2%) of samples taken since September 30, 2018. However, in the tenth week of 2019, H3N2 was in 61.3% of the samples. "It looks like people are becoming more sick from the H3N2 strain than H1N1," said Masters.

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Both strains are in the current influenza vaccine, Overall, effectiveness of the vaccine has been better than last year according to the CDC. Midseason estimates suggest that the flu shot has reduced the risk of illness by around 47 percent in vaccinated people. During the 2017-18 flu season, vaccine effectiveness was estimated at just 36 percent. Flu vaccine effectiveness of 47 percent means you are half as likely to come down with the flu this season if you have been immunized.

Health officials said even if you come down with the flu, the flu vaccine can still offer protection. This year's flu vaccine is especially effective in children, at 61 percent. Experts said even if the vaccine is not a perfect match, the vaccine can still help lessen the severity of the flu, and reduce the chance of experiencing severe complications. Getting a vaccine also can reduce the length of the flu if you do get sick.

Flu vaccine is still available at the health department and several local pharmacies. Dudgeon said it's not too late to get a flu shot, especially if you are traveling or plan to be at events where there are lots of people, like concerts, shopping malls or sporting events.

"The virus is very contagious. It is spread through droplets that can come from sneezes, coughs or contact with an infected surface." If someone is starting to develop symptoms like a high fever, muscle aches and chills they should consider seeing a healthcare provider, said Dudgeon. "The sooner it can be diagnosed, the sooner it can be treated and hopefully there will be fewer complications."

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