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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Influenza Alert

[Ventura County, CA] – We are in the fourth week of an unusually severe influenza outbreak caused by influenza A (H3N2). In most years an influenza outbreak begins to decline after 2 to 3 weeks. As of January 11, there have been 13 influenza-related deaths in Ventura County. Two of these deaths have been in people under 65 years of age but neither of them were children. This is more deaths than were seen during the swine flu outbreak of 2009-10 (2009 H1N1 influenza A).

Influenza A (H3N2) virus is the dominant strain locally and throughout the U.S. There are three things we can do to protect ourselves and others from the flu. They are: 1) get vaccinated, 2) use good hand and respiratory hygiene, 3) and stay home while sick!

Influenza vaccination has been less effective in general against influenza A(H3N2) viruses than against the A(H1N1) or influenza B viruses; however, this season all influenza viruses from California that were genetically tested have matched the strains in the vaccine, **making the vaccine a good match. The single best thing you can do to protect yourself from the flu is get vaccinated.** Health officials encourage Californians to get vaccinated. "Vaccination will prevent infection in a large number of cases. If disease does occur after vaccination, the vaccine can reduce the severity of flu symptoms and prevent both hospitalization and death" said Dr. Robert Levin, Health Officer, Ventura County. "Getting the flu shot is still the best way to protect yourself and others from the flu."

Emergency departments are crowded and ambulances are at times backed up. People who are not extremely ill should first make an effort to be seen by their personal physician. Most people with the flu will have more moderate symptoms and will recover within about a week by resting and drinking plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.

Some people are at high risk for serious flu-related complications:

- Pregnant women
- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- People 65 years of age and older
- People who have certain medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and immune suppression

For those at high risk of serious flu complications, getting vaccinated is especially important. It is also important for parents and other caregivers of anyone at high risk, including children younger than 6 months, who are too young to get the flu vaccine. A complete list of those conditions and characteristics that may put you at higher risk for complications can be found at:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Immunization/FluClinicianAdvisory2017-12.pdf>.

Individuals in a high-risk group that experience symptoms of flu (fever, chills and feeling very tired accompanied by sore throat, muscle or body aches, headaches, or nasal congestion), *should contact their health care provider early in the illness.*

Antiviral drugs can be prescribed by a physician and work best if started within two days of getting sick. Individuals who are not in high risk groups and who have mild illness typically do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. **Anyone who experiences more severe symptoms such as trouble breathing, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, difficulty eating or drinking, or confusion should contact their health care provider IMMEDIATELY.**

To stop the spread of flu and other respiratory illnesses, you should:

- Stay home while sick and limit contact with others
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve or disposable tissue
- Wash hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth

Flu vaccine is available in many locations, including doctors' offices, the health department, pharmacies, health centers and travel clinics, as well as at many employers and schools. Use the HealthMap Vaccine Finder at (<https://vaccinefinder.org/>) to find the nearest location where you and your family can get vaccinated. It is not too late to get the flu vaccine.

Unfortunately, there may be short term supply chain difficulties in getting Tamiflu (oseltamivir). Call around to other pharmacies and you will find the drug. Supply chain difficulties are being worked on at the State and local level. There is no national shortage of the medication.

For more information about influenza, visit CDPH's website (<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/Influenza.aspx>).

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