Influenza in Santa Barbara County

Influenza, also known as flu, is now widespread in Santa Barbara County. There have been 5 known flu-related deaths in the county this season. One of the deaths is in a person under the age of 65 years and the remaining 4 deaths have been in persons older than 65 years of age. There have also been 4 confirmed Intensive Care hospitalizations with patients in the 0 – 64 age range.

Healthcare providers and hospitals are seeing many patients this month presenting with flu-like illnesses. Many of these cases are due to the influenza virus itself, and can be prevented by getting an influenza vaccine. The amount of protection that the influenza vaccine provides depends on many things and changes every year. Although not all types of influenza are covered by the annual vaccine, the vaccine is an excellent way to help people stay healthy and can lessen the severity of symptoms for those who get sick.

Charity Dean, MD, MPH, Health Officer, notes “The best way we can protect ourselves and our families from illness during the flu and cold season is to:

• Get a flu vaccine if you have not done so
• Stay home if sick
• Use good hand hygiene
• Cover coughs and sneezes"

The peak of Influenza season in the United States typically occurs in February. But can stretch through April or May. Because of this, people who have not yet received the Influenza vaccine still have time to protect themselves by getting vaccinated.

Most people who get the flu recover in less than two weeks. However, some people are more likely to get complications from the flu that result in hospitalization or death. The influenza vaccine is especially important for these groups, which include:

• Children younger than 5
• Adults age 65 or older
• Pregnant women
• Residents of long-term care facilities
• Those with the following medical conditions: asthma, lung disease, neurological conditions, heart disease, kidney disorders, weakened immune system, and morbid obesity.

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