

It Is Not Too Late To Vaccinate!

Influenza is particularly risky for older adults and other individuals in long-term care facilities. The flu vaccine is the most effective protection against the flu. During the last flu season, influenza activity reached epidemic levels in Kentucky. In January 2019, the Department for Public Health reported “widespread” flu activity in Kentucky for the first time this flu season. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), so far this season, between about 6 million and 7 million people have been sick with flu, up to half of those people have sought medical care for their illness, and between 69,000 and 84,000 people have been hospitalized from flu. The CDC expects the flu activity to persist for weeks and continues to recommend flu vaccination and appropriate use of antiviral medications.

“Flu season most often peaks between December and March, but activity can occur as late as May,” says Dr. Dan Jernigan, Director of the Influenza Division at CDC. “We are encouraging people who have not yet been vaccinated this season to get vaccinated now.”

It is important to keep in mind that it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies that protect against influenza virus infection to develop in the body.

Prevention is the Key

Remind staff of critical precautions, which include the following:

- Wearing gloves if hand contact with respiratory secretions or potentially contaminated surfaces is anticipated.
- Wearing a gown if soiling of clothes with a resident’s respiratory secretions is anticipated.
- Changing gloves and gowns after each resident encounter and performing correct hand hygiene.
- Perform hand hygiene before and after touching the resident, after touching the resident’s environment, or after touching the resident’s respiratory secretions, whether or not gloves are worn. **Gloves do not replace the need for performing hand hygiene.**
- Implement [Droplet Precautions](#) for residents with suspected or confirmed influenza for seven days after illness onset or until 24 hours after the resolution of fever and respiratory symptoms, whichever is longer.

Consider the following additional measures to reduce transmission among residents and health care personnel:

- Have symptomatic residents stay in their rooms as much as possible, including restricting them from common activities, and have their meals served in their rooms when possible.
- Limit the number of large group activities in the facility and consider serving all meals in resident rooms if possible when the outbreak is widespread (involving multiple units of the facility).
- Avoid new admissions or transfers to halls with symptomatic residents.
- Limit visitation and exclude ill persons from visiting the facility via posted notices.
- Consider restricting visitation by children during community outbreaks of influenza.
- Monitor personnel absenteeism due to respiratory symptoms and exclude those with influenza-like symptoms from work until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever.

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- Restrict personnel movement from areas of the facility having illness to areas not affected by the outbreak.
- Administer the current season's influenza vaccine to unvaccinated residents and health care personnel as per current vaccination recommendations.

Qsource Is Available to Assist

Scott Gibson is the Qsource Quality Improvement Advisor for Kentucky. Scott is an expert on quality improvement and offers education on a wide variety of topics, including good vaccine practices for long-term care. Please contact Scott by email at scott.gibson@area-G.hcqis.org or by phone at 502-680-2669 to receive free technical assistance. Also available are past articles on other health care related issues, such as Composite Scores, pain management, and behavioral health strategies! Contact Scott for copies of past articles on these topics and more!



Scott Gibson

More On atom Alliance

Formed as a partnership between three leading healthcare consultancies, atom Alliance is working under contract to CMS throughout Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee to improve quality and achieve better outcomes in health and healthcare and at lower costs for the patients and communities. Through atom Alliance, AQAF in Alabama, IQH in Mississippi and Qsource in Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee are carrying out an exciting strategic plan, with programs in place to convene, teach and inform healthcare providers, engage and empower patients, and inspire, share knowledge and spread best practices with communities across the entire healthcare continuum. Please visit the atom Alliance website for helpful educational resources on various topics.

Please, encourage your residents and staff to protect themselves and also obtain tetanus and pneumococcal vaccines, in addition to their influenza shots!

Article Resources:

1. <http://atomalliance.org/initiatives/improving-immunization-rates/>
2. <http://www.rcnky.com/articles/2018/01/26/flu-reaches-epidemic-level-kentucky-8-die-nky>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/>