

**October 24, 2017**

## **Officials always on alert for looming flu pandemic**

MOBILE, Alabama — Last month there was a small swine flu outbreak in Maryland ([https://www.fredericknews.com/public/quarantine-set-to-end-with-no-new-cases-of-swine/article\\_b86eba6b-4132-5ab6-9d6b-b57d1fbfc3e6.html](https://www.fredericknews.com/public/quarantine-set-to-end-with-no-new-cases-of-swine/article_b86eba6b-4132-5ab6-9d6b-b57d1fbfc3e6.html)) as hundreds of pigs in at least three counties tested positive.

Worse, more than 40 people contracted H3N2v swine flu after visiting the pig exhibits at the three county fairs. Several people were hospitalized and several pigs died.

Incidents like these where influenza is transmitted from animals to people are always on the radar for public health officials, as they can quickly spread without prompt identification and containment. Small outbreaks like this one happen regularly all over the world and sometimes result in a serious health scare, such as the most recent pandemic swine flu in 2009, which resulted in more than 12,000 deaths in the United States (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/basics/past-pandemics.html>).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is always on alert as pandemic influenza cannot be predicted (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/index.htm>). Pandemics happen when new (novel) influenza A viruses emerge which are able to infect people easily and spread from person to person in an efficient and sustained way.

It has been almost a century since the mostly deadly influenza pandemic struck in 1918. It was caused by an H1N1 virus with genes of avian origin. Although there is not universal consensus regarding where the virus originated, it spread worldwide during 1918-1919. In the United States, it was first identified in military personnel in spring 1918.

It is estimated that about 500 million people — or one-third of the world's population — became infected with this virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide with about 675,000 occurring in the United States. The high mortality in healthy people, including those in the 20-40 year age group, was a unique feature of this pandemic.

Family Health, the primary care division of the Mobile County Health Department, is now offering flu shots to the general public. The shots are provided at all clinics conveniently located throughout Mobile County.

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The clinic locations and hours of operation include:

- Children's Health Center (248 Cox Street, Mobile, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- Citronelle Health Center (19250 North Mobile Street, Citronelle, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)
- Dauphin Island Parkway Health Center (2601 Dauphin Island Parkway, Mobile, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- Eight Mile Health Center (4009 Saint Stephens Road, Prichard, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- North Mobile Health Center (950 East Coy Smith Highway, Mount Vernon, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- Semmes Health Center (3810 Wulff Road East, Semmes, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- Southwest Mobile Health Center (5580 Inn Road, Tillman's Corner, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- Women's Health Center (248 Cox Street, Mobile, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays expect Wednesday when it remains open to 6 p.m.)

The Urgent Care facility located at the Maj. Gen. William C. Gorgas Clinic in Downtown Mobile at 251 N. Bayou Street will also offer flu shots during the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. on weekdays and 8 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. For a map of Family Health clinic locations, please visit <http://FamilyHealthAlabama.org>.

If a patient has a scheduled medical visit, the flu shot will be included in their visit and there will not be an additional charge to receive the flu shot on that visit.

Patients who do not have a visit with a Family Health provider in the clinic on the same day will pay a nominal administration fee for the flu shot based on their poverty scale: \$15 for levels A and B, \$16 for levels C and D; \$17 for level E; and \$18 for levels F and G.

Most insurance plans have no out-of-pocket expense.