

February 7, 2019

Report states influenza-like symptoms increasing across Alabama

MOBILE, Alabama — The Weekly Influenza Report from the Alabama Department of Public Health (www.alabamapublichealth.gov/influenza/) states that influenza-like illness is currently at 8 percent statewide. This represents an increase in the number of patients visiting their doctor with flu-like symptoms for the third week in a row.

For the first time, Mobile County is not listed among “Districts with no significant influenza activity reported.” It is now in the second tier for “Districts with lab-confirmed cases with last three weeks.”

Barbara Gibbs, R.N., M.P.H., who oversees the Infectious Diseases & Outbreaks division at the Mobile County Health Department, cautioned the latest figures can be deceiving. As of Wednesday, there have been 706 cases in Mobile County from reports received for visits seen at our local hospitals and MCHD where a rapid flu test was done. The ADPH map is from specimens sent up and had Polymerase Chain Reaction testing.

“That is based on the specimens received this past week,” she said of the ADPH’s Weekly Influenza Report. “It is not as significant (in Mobile County) as last year.” Last year’s local numbers were three times greater at this same time.

The most cases reported in Mobile County during the previous season came in the final weeks of February 2018. Gibbs said it is not too late to get the vaccine, especially with Carnival season about to ramp up.

“The flu is a very contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses,” she said. “The symptoms associated with the flu are fever — although not everyone has a fever — cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, sometimes diarrhea and vomiting.”

“It causes mild to severe illness and can lead to death. The best way to prevent flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year. It is not too late to get vaccinated. The vaccine is widely available through your doctor’s office, Mobile County Health Department, urgent care centers and pharmacies.”

All of MCHD’s Family Health locations offer the vaccine. Our Urgent Care facility located at the Maj. Gen. William C. Gorgas Health Center in Downtown Mobile at 251 North 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 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. There is no out-of-pocket expense with most insurance plans.