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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Influenza Update

[Ventura County, CA] – As of February 7, 2019, Ventura County has seen 5 influenza-related deaths this flu season, which started in October 2018. To give some perspective, at this point in 2018, the county had seen 40 deaths resulting from complications from the influenza virus. Many deaths seen during a flu season occur in people who have multiple health issues, such as diabetes, dementia, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

“In these people the acquisition of the flu tips the balance against them. It is likely that another severe respiratory illness at another time of year may have had a similar outcome,” said Ventura County Health Officer Dr. Robert Levin. “Last year’s influenza virus, H3N2, was a particularly difficult strain,” he added, noting that this year the county is seeing H1N1, which is also known as the ‘bird flu influenza,’ and was last seen in 2010.

Patients who are at higher risk for complications include:

- Persons aged 65 years and older
- Children 5 years of age and younger, with those 2 years of age and younger particularly vulnerable
- Persons with chronic pulmonary, cardiovascular (except hypertension alone), renal, hepatic, hematological (including sickle cell disease), and metabolic disorders or neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions
- People with immunosuppression, including those caused by medications or by HIV infection
- Women who are pregnant or postpartum (within 2 weeks after delivery)
- People aged younger than 19 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- American Indians/Alaska Natives
- People with extreme obesity (i.e., body-mass index is equal to or greater than 40)
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities

“However, the H1N1 strain which we see circulating this year is notorious for its disproportionate severity in people in the prime of life, from childhood through 60 years of age,” said Dr. Levin.

It is not too late to get immunized. Public Health recommends immunization of all persons 6 months and older. While last year’s vaccine effectiveness was limited, there is every indication that the vaccine this year is significantly more effective. Immunization can reduce the severity of illness, hospitalization and death due to influenza. It can also, of course, prevent getting the flu altogether. As a reminder, children younger than 9 years of age who have never received influenza vaccine, require 2 doses at least 4 weeks apart during their first season.

Flu vaccine can still be found at many individual doctor’s offices, clinics and pharmacies and can be received for low or no cost at the two public health clinics and at the ambulatory clinics referenced at: www.vchca.org/ph

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