

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 14, 2010

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AUTUMN LEAVES AND THE FLU VIRUS: IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR...GET VACCINATED!

(Farmville, VA) As the weather cools and the trees begin to glow, we're pleasantly reminded about the cycle of the seasons. Other, less pleasant, things come in cycles too. Yes, it's time to get ready for flu season again.

This year is the first time that health experts recommend that everyone over the age of 6 months should get a flu shot as soon as it becomes available. Getting a flu shot is especially important for people 65 years old and older because they are at increased risk of developing medical complications if they get the flu. The CDC also strongly recommends that pregnant women, people with chronic medical conditions and children younger than five years old should receive a flu shot.

Peak flu season in the United States is during the winter months, when people are indoors and in closer contact with each other. "Here in Virginia, we see most flu cases in January and February, but flu season can start as early as October and last until May," said Piedmont Health District Director, Alex Samuel, M.D., MPH. "Getting vaccinated in October or November gives the body ample time to prepare itself before peak flu season hits," Dr. Samuel added.

Influenza, or the flu, is caused by a virus, which is spread from person to person when someone infected with the virus coughs or sneezes releasing the virus into the air. You can catch the flu by inhaling this virus or by touching something that has the flu virus on it (like a table top or door knob) and then touching your nose or mouth. Once inside your body, the virus quickly multiplies and usually infects the tissues of your lungs, throat, and nose causing symptoms that can range from mild to severe. Most people who get the flu experience fever, chills, sore throat, cough, headache, and aching muscles and joints. For some, the flu can be a very serious infection, resulting in hospitalization or even death.

"The best way to keep from getting the flu is to get a yearly flu shot", said Dr. Samuel.

"The flu virus is extremely contagious and also very adaptable, which not be able to defend itself against a newer version of the flu virus, even if you got a flu shot last year," added Dr. Samuel. Your body may means that the virus can change slightly from year to year. Getting vaccinated against the flu every season protects against the flu viruses that research shows will cause the

most illness. The flu vaccine being offered this year contains inactivated strains of three different influenza viruses, one of these strains is H1N1. This means that if you get a flu shot, you will be protected against the two seasonal flu viruses predicted to cause the most illness and the H1N1 flu virus. It is also important to remember that even though you might experience mild flu symptoms after receiving the flu shot, the flu shot does not give you the flu because it contains inactivated, or dead, viruses.

Some people should speak with their doctor before getting a flu shot. This group includes people who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs, people who have had a severe allergic reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past, and people who developed a condition called Guillian-Barre syndrome (a disorder of the nervous system) within six weeks of getting a flu shot in the past.

There are a number of simple ways to prevent the spread of flu virus. Hand washing is one of the best.

- Wash your hands often using warm, soapy water and use alcohol-based hand sanitizers if soap and water are not immediately available.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with your sleeve or tissue paper.
- Stay home from work or school if you aren't feeling well.

Protect yourself and those you love by getting a flu shot and doing your part to prevent the spread of flu virus. Even though it comes around once a year, lets work together to make flu season something we worry less about so we can enjoy this time of year more.

For more information log onto www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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