



MEDIA RELEASE

KNOX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Dec. 14, 2018

KCHD offers guidance this flu season

Includes knowing when to go to emergency department

Knoxville, Tenn. – With cold and flu season upon us and considering the upcoming closure of Physicians Regional Medical Center, the Knox County Health Department (KCHD) is encouraging the public to follow some basic precautions to reduce the spread of disease and avoid unnecessarily overburdening hospital emergency departments.

“It’s the time of year when many hospitals report an increase in traffic in their emergency departments due to flu, respiratory illnesses and other conditions. Traditionally many of those seen in hospital emergency rooms could instead seek care at their regular health care provider or a walk-in clinic, which would free up hospitals for emergencies,” said KCHD Director Dr. Martha Buchanan. “With the upcoming hospital closure, it’s more important than ever that residents know when to go to a provider versus the emergency room.”

Flu symptoms can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, and sometimes diarrhea and vomiting. Most people with the flu do not need medical care or antiviral drugs, and in most cases, those with flu symptoms should stay home and avoid contact with others. However, if someone in a high-risk group has symptoms of the flu or if someone is greatly concerned about the illness, he or she should first contact a medical provider or walk-in clinic before visiting the hospital, reserving the hospital emergency department for actual emergencies.

Young children, people aged 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with certain medical conditions, including asthma, chronic lung disease, heart disease and diabetes, are considered high risk. A comprehensive list of high-risk groups is available on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s \(CDC\) website](#).

Influenza guidelines include:

- **If someone is mildly ill with flu symptoms, he or she should not go to the emergency room. Hospital emergency departments should be reserved for those who are severely ill or injured.**
- The following mild flu symptoms usually do not require treatment at an emergency room: runny nose or nasal stuffiness, low-grade fever for less than three days, mild headache, body aches, or stomach upset. Instead of visiting the emergency room, call your health care provider or seek care at a walk-in clinic, many of which are open in the evenings and on weekends.
- Limit visits to friends and relatives in the hospital. Postpone visits to the hospital to protect patients, staff and yourself from the flu. If you must visit, check with the hospital first to see if any visitor restrictions have been established.
- Stay home and away from others, especially the elderly, children or those with chronic health conditions, if you are sick. If you must leave home, to get medical care for example, wear a facemask if you have one or be sure to cover your cough and sneeze.



- Wash your hands thoroughly and often to help lower your risk of getting the flu or to keep from spreading the flu to others.
- The CDC recommends those with flu symptoms stay home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicines. Staying home includes avoiding work, school, travel, shopping, social events and public gatherings.

Patients should go to the emergency room if exhibiting any of the following emergency warning signs of flu:

In children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In addition to the signs on the left, seek medical help **immediately** for an infant who has any of these signs:

- Being unable to eat
- Has trouble breathing
- Has no tears when crying
- Significantly fewer wet diapers than normal

In adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough

It is not too late to get a flu vaccine. The CDC recommends vaccination as long as flu viruses are circulating. Flu vaccines are still widely available in the community at pharmacies and health care provider offices. They are also available at KCHD's offices: the main location, 140 Dameron Ave.; West Clinic, 1028 Old Cedar Bluff Rd.; and Teague Clinic, 405 Dante Rd. To reduce wait time, appointments at KCHD are recommended by calling 865-215-5070. KCHD clinics are open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Flu activity generally peaks between December and February, but the exact timing, severity and length of the flu season varies from year to year. More information about influenza, including the current activity, is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>.

About Knox County Health Department

As the first health department in Tennessee to achieve national voluntary accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board, the Knox County Health Department (KCHD) is dedicated to ensuring the conditions in which every resident can be healthy. KCHD investigates disease outbreaks, identifies community health threats, conducts extensive outreach and education, prepares for public health emergencies, provides and connects the public with medical care, enforces food safety and air quality laws, and more. For more information, visit www.knoxcounty.org/health.

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