



MEDIA RELEASE

KNOX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Knox County Mayor and KCHD Director team up to fight flu *Encourage community to know when to go to the ER*

Knoxville, Tenn. – With seasonal influenza activity still high and many area hospitals continuing to report an elevated volume of patients in their emergency departments, Knox County Mayor Tim Burchett and Knox County Health Department (KCHD) Director Dr. Martha Buchanan are taking another step to promote some important guidelines. Today the County released a public service announcement encouraging the community to know when to go to the ER and save hospital emergency departments for those most at risk.

“The flu and other illnesses are sending many people to area ERs, even some folks who may not need an emergency visit,” said Knox County Mayor Tim Burchett. “It’s important, for the health and safety of our community, to save space in our hospitals and emergency departments for those who need it most. In many cases, a trip to your doctor or to a walk-in or urgent care clinic is a better option.”

“It’s important that we take influenza seriously, but we must save the ER for those who are most at risk of severe disease, including young children, the elderly and those with chronic conditions,” said KCHD Director Dr. Martha Buchanan. “We understand knowing when to go to the ER can be a concern for some, so we’ve included that information in all our guidance, including this PSA.”

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. 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 highly concerned about the illness, he or she should first contact a medical provider or walk-in clinic and save the hospital emergency department for actual emergencies. Many walk-in and urgent care clinics operate in the evenings and on weekends.

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 full 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.
- 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’re 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 keep from spreading the flu to others. Washing your hands properly and frequently can also lower your risk of getting the flu.
- 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.

Those with the emergency warning signs of flu, should go to the emergency room. These signs include:

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

KCHD is offering free flu vaccinations while supplies last at all three of its locations: the main location, 140 Dameron Ave., West Clinic, 1028 Old Cedar Bluff Rd., and Teague Clinic, 405 Dante Rd. To reduce wait time, appointments are recommended by calling 865-215-5070. Clinics are open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Free flu vaccinations only apply to the standard flu shot, not the high-dose version recommended for those over 65 years of age. The CDC recommends vaccination as long as influenza viruses are circulating.

Flu activity generally peaks between December and February, but the exact timing, severity and length of the flu season usually varies from one year to another. According to the CDC, all national key flu indicators are elevated and most of the country is experiencing high flu activity, including Tennessee.

About Knox County Health Department

The Knox County Health Department (KCHD) is a governmental agency dedicated to making every person a healthy person. As the first health department in Tennessee to achieve national accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board, KCHD's mission is to encourage, promote and assure the development of an active, healthy community through innovative public health practices. The organization conducts disease surveillance, prevention and control; emergency preparedness; nutrition and physical activity promotion; tobacco use prevention; health equity promotion; immunizations; and much more. For more information, visit www.knoxcounty.org/health.

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For a copy of the PSA, please contact KCHD Communications Specialist Daryl Hobby at 865-215-5116 or daryl.hobby@knoxcounty.org.

