For Immediate Release

Take precautions against flu as schools in nearby counties close to avoid spread

MORGANTOWN, WV (Feb. 6, 2020) — As schools in Marion and Doddridge counties plan to close Friday, Feb. 7, because of influenza outbreaks, Monongalia County schools are not seeing an absent rate to warrant such action.

However, influenza is considered widespread in all of West Virginia, so it’s good to remain vigilant in order to remain flu-free.

“If you haven’t gotten your flu vaccine, it’s not too late,” said Dr. Lee B. Smith, Monongalia County Health Department’s executive director and county health officer.

Flu vaccines are available at MCHD Clinical Services. To make an appointment, call 304-598-5119. Flu vaccine is recommended for anyone 6 months and older, including pregnant women.

Jennifer Goldcamp, MCHD Clinical Services program manager and director of nursing, noted that other steps to follow including good hand washing, getting plenty of sleep and covering coughs and sneezes.

“And if you begin to develop flu symptoms, antiviral medications are a great way to shorten the length and severity of the illness,” she added.

Also, anyone who has influenza or influenza-like illness (ILI) should stay home from work or school to avoid getting others sick.
Symptoms of flu include fever, headaches, runny nose, scratchy throat, body aches and fatigue. Some individuals, especially children, also can experience vomiting and diarrhea, usually in conjunction with other influenza symptoms.

Most people who get the flu recover in a week or two. However, flu can cause complications, especially in senior citizens, people with other health conditions and young children. Complications can include pneumonia, bronchitis and even death. The number of hospitalizations due to flu varies from season to season. In recent years, that number has been as low as 140,000 and as high as 710,000.

Since Oct. 1, 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov) estimates that between 10,000 and 25,000 people have died in the United States from flu. It’s also estimated that in this same time period, there have been between 19 million and 26 million flu illnesses; between 8.6 million and 12 million medical visits due to flu; and between 180,000-310,000 hospital stays.

In contrast, about 563 people have died of coronavirus in China and one person has died from that illness in the Philippines.

According to numbers provided by the West Virginia Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology on Thursday, flu cases were steadily rising and then began to spike statewide toward the end of January. The most recent numbers provided, for Jan. 26, had the northeastern region of West Virginia at a 6.8% flu rate. By comparison, Monongalia County was at 7.2% and Marion County was at 5.9%. Those were the most recent figures provided.

Susan Haslebacher, supervisor of school health for Monongalia County Schools, said although Monongalia County students have influenza, it has not reached numbers that would warrant school closure.

“Although flu absences are being reported, we are not seeing huge spikes in absences,” she said. “And in schools, we’re taking all kinds of precautions. We’re urging kids to stay home if they have a fever and are sick and we’re making sure the custodial staff is on point. We’re doing all that good stuff.”

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