



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KNOX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT OFFERS GUIDELINES FOR VISITING THE ER *Flu Symptoms Normally Don't Require a Hospital Visit*

Area hospitals are experiencing an increase in the number of patients arriving into emergency departments with influenza-like symptoms which don't require immediate medical attention, and Knox County Health Department is offering guidance to help the public decide if a trip to the hospital for flu symptoms is merited.

"Unnecessary emergency room visits put additional stress on the medical system, which will only get worse as the flu season progresses," said Dr. Martha Buchanan, Knox County Health Department Medical Director. "The emergency room should be used by people who are very sick. Please do not go if you are only mildly ill."

Symptoms of influenza can include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, runny nose, tiredness, diarrhea, and vomiting. People who are not ill or have mild symptoms for which they would not ordinarily seek medical care do not need to do so.

KCHD urges visiting the emergency room if you have the following Influenza Emergency Warning Signs identified by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

In Children

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- No waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In Adults

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

“If you get sick with flu symptoms, are in a high-risk group for complications or are concerned about your illness, call your health care provider for advice,” said Buchanan. “Unnecessary emergency room visits also could spread the disease by exposing other patients and their families to the flu virus. And if you are suffering a true medical emergency, you don’t want to catch the flu in the emergency room.”

Those at risk for complications and who should contact their personal provider if flu symptoms develop are:

- Children younger than 5, especially children younger than 2 years old
- People age 65 and older
- Pregnant women
- People who have
 - Cancer
 - Blood disorders, including sickle cell disease
 - Chronic lung disease, including asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
 - Diabetes
 - Heart disease
 - Kidney disorders
 - Liver disorders
 - Neurological disorders, including nervous system, brain or spinal cord
 - Neuromuscular disorders, including muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis
 - Weakened immune systems, including people with AIDS

“It’s very possible for healthy people to develop severe illness from the flu, so anyone concerned about their illness should consult a health care provider,” said Buchanan. “We are asking everyone to please remember that emergency rooms should be reserved for those with life-threatening illness or injury.

“Remember, basic precautions can slow the spread of the virus and protect the more medically fragile in the community: Stay home if you are sick, cover your cough and wash your hands thoroughly and often.”

More information is available at www.knoxcounty.org/flu or www.flu.gov. The Tennessee Department of Health Flu Information Line is open Monday through Friday from noon to 8 p.m. at 1-877-252-3432. The call is free.

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