

CITY OF BALTIMORE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Baltimore City Health Department Announces “Decreasing Flu”
and Releases Final Seasonal Flu Report**

Baltimore, MD (May 19, 2008) – Baltimore City Health Department reports the City is now in stage four of its Seasonal Flu Plan, “Decreasing Flu,” based on state and city surveillance efforts.

Influenza, also known as “the flu,” is a contagious, viral illness affecting 5% to 20% of the U.S. population annually. Influenza causes an average of 226,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths each year in the U.S. Vaccination is the primary method of preventing transmission of influenza and its associated complications.

This year, “Flu Alert” began at the beginning of December, shortly after the first case of confirmed flu was noted in Baltimore City. Peak flu season occurred in late January/early February and levels of flu have declined since. Levels of illness and death due to pneumonia or influenza thus far are comparable to past flu seasons.

The Health Department carried out several steps to provide education regarding flu this year:

- press conferences were held with a local hospital
- more than 50,000 flu cards were given out that detailed prevention strategies and how to obtain a free flu vaccine
- communication was maintained between the Health Department and local hospital Infection Control Practitioners
- biweekly surveillance reports were published on the Health Department website, tracking the flu season closely
- more than 3,400 people have been vaccinated for flu by the Health Department

“This was the first year of our Seasonal Flu Plan,” said Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Commissioner of Health. “Our response to future influenza seasons, which may be more severe, will be coordinated based on our data and collaborations that we initiated this year.”

A summary of this year’s flu season is available on the Health Department’s website at www.baltimorehealth.org.

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