

CITY OF BALTIMORE

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Baltimore City Health Department Announces Citywide Flu Alert

Baltimore, MD (February 19, 2009) – The Baltimore City Health Department has raised the City’s flu level from “Minimal Flu” to “Flu Alert.” This level means there is strong evidence that influenza is now spreading in Baltimore.

This evidence includes:

- A sustained increase in flu activity in the past two weeks. Sentinel labs are reporting 12% of tests as positive, up from about 6% in the previous reporting period.
- Acute care hospitals are reporting an increased number of positive flu tests among patients.

The Health Department is making several urgent recommendations to save lives during this flu season:

1. Get the flu vaccine! Call 311 or visit baltimorehealth.org for help locating a free vaccine clinic or call your doctor. The flu vaccine is especially recommended for children six months to five years, pregnant or breastfeeding women, persons over age 50 or with chronic medical conditions, and those who live in long term care facilities. Household contacts of these at-risk groups, including parents and caregivers of children less than 6 months, should also be vaccinated. There are three free flu vaccine clinics in Baltimore next week.
2. All eligible health care workers who have not yet been vaccinated should receive the flu vaccine as soon as possible.
3. Good hand hygiene is important. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer before meals, after coughing or sneezing or using the restrooms, and when talking with people who are ill.
4. Cough and sneeze into a sleeve or tissue, and keep hands away from mouth, nose and eyes.

5. When you or your child are ill, stay home whenever possible.

Because of the Flu Alert, the Health Department will increase its flu surveillance and publish weekly updates regarding 911 and emergency room chief complaints, hospital crowding, the number of positive influenza cases and flu outbreaks.

So far, there have been no signs of significant strain in the healthcare system related to flu.

For the flu vaccine schedule, the Seasonal Flu Plan, and the weekly surveillance reports, go to www.baltimorehealth.org/flu. Information on flu vaccines is also available by calling 311 or the Bureau of Child Health and Immunization at 410-396-4454.

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