



News Articles, Infectious Diseases, Vaccine/Immunization

CDC: Flu blamed in deaths of 37 children

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Editor's note: An updated flu story is now available at <http://www.aapublications.org/news/2018/02/02/flu020218>.

Thirty-seven children have died of **flu-related** illness this season, and health officials are urging everyone 6 months and older to be vaccinated.

The virus continues to be widespread in most of the country, and the season could last another two months, experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said Friday.

"We often see different parts of the country light up at different times, but for the past three weeks the entire country has been experiencing lots of flu all at the same time," said Dan Jernigan, M.D., M.P.H., director of the Influenza Division of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.

H3N2 strains have been most common, often a sign of a season with more severe illness. However, the CDC also is seeing upticks in H1N1 and influenza B in some areas.

Roughly **6.6% of outpatient visits** in clinics and emergency departments for all ages were for influenza-like illness last week, the highest activity level since the 2009 H1N1 pandemic that peaked at 7.7%, according to Dr. Jernigan. The increase in activity in recent weeks may be due to children returning to school after the holidays, he said.

The flu hospitalization rate of 41.9 of every 100,000 population last week is similar to the 2014-'15 season. That season, 148 children died. Dr. Jernigan said the 37 pediatric deaths so far likely are lower than the actual figure because not all are reported immediately to the CDC.

"We expect there will be more reports of pediatric deaths similar to what we've seen in more severe seasons," Dr. Jernigan said.

He encouraged people to protect themselves through vaccination, frequent handwashing and avoiding people who are sick. Those who are ill should cover their mouth when they cough and stay at home.

The CDC believes vaccine effectiveness will track closely to last year, which was 32% for H3 viruses and 39% for all strains.

Resources

- [AAP policy "Recommendations for Prevention and Control of Influenza in Children, 2017 - 2018"](#)
- [Information from the CDC about flu](#)
- [Information for parents on flu vaccine from HealthyChildren.org](#)
- [AAP News stories on flu](#)