

Several Influenza Deaths in US, Including One Child, as Flu Season Begins

Troy Brown, RN

October 17, 2018

Several patients including one child have died from influenza as the first week of the 2018-19 flu season drew to a close, according to news and public health department reports.

Florida Reports First Pediatric Flu Fatality

A child in Florida became the first pediatric influenza fatality this season, according to the Florida Department of Health. The child died from influenza B during week 40 of 2018 (September 30 to October 6). "We can confirm there was one new influenza-associated pediatric death reported in an unvaccinated child. Due to privacy concerns we are not releasing any other details concerning this case," Brad Dalton, deputy press secretary, Office of Communications, Florida Department of Health, told *Medscape Medical News*.

The [Florida Flu Review](#) for week 40 reports the child had no underlying medical conditions.

"Eight influenza-associated pediatric deaths were reported to the Department during the 2017-18 season. None had received their influenza vaccine. While rare, these deaths do occur every year, mostly in unvaccinated children with underlying health conditions," Dalton continued.

During the 2017-18 influenza season, 515 outbreaks of influenza or influenza-like illness (ILI) were reported to the Florida Department of Health, he said.

"Influenza deaths in adults are not reportable in Florida. To capture the number of adult deaths, the Department utilizes data from death certificates to count the number of deaths with pneumonia or influenza listed on the death certificate. We do this because influenza is infrequently listed on the death certificates of those who die from flu (often because influenza testing is never conducted or because the individual died later from complications associated with influenza infection)," Dalton explained.

"For these reasons, it's become commonplace to count pneumonia and influenza deaths. During the 2017-18 season in Florida, there were 8922 pneumonia and influenza deaths in adults aged 18 years and older," he continued.

Kansas Reports Two Deaths

Two adults in Kansas have died as a direct cause of influenza. Pneumonia or influenza was a contributing factor in the death of 132 individuals and pneumonia was a direct cause of death in 38 patients, according to a Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) [report](#) for the period ending October 6. "We do not release the age or location of specific influenza deaths because of patient confidentiality. However, we can say that we have not had any pediatric deaths reported to us," Gerald Kratochvil, communications director, KDHE, told *Medscape Medical News*. He added they also do not disclose information related to whether patients had any comorbidities.

"Kansas regulations do not require healthcare providers to report cases of influenza to KDHE except for pediatric deaths and novel infections. Instead, influenza activity is measured through several surveillance systems that measure activity as a percentage rather than individual cases. For example, facilities that are part of our Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet) report to us the percentage of ILI visits they have seen," Kratochvil explained.

"Currently, all regions of Kansas are experiencing low activity of influenza. The following counties have reported some influenza-like illness. It is important to note, not all counties have facilities who participate in influenza surveillance," he continued.

Low levels of influenza activity have been reported in the following counties: Douglas, Shawnee, Sherman, Ellis, Cloud, Neosho, Crawford, Sedgwick, Brown, Johnson, Wyandotte, Cherokee, Dickinson, and Wichita.

Kentucky Reports First Influenza-Related Death

A woman was the first person in Kentucky to die from an ILI, Barbara Fox, public information officer, Kentucky Department for Public Health, told *Medscape Medical News*.

Fox said they do not know whether the patient was vaccinated against influenza, but she was in her 60s and had pre-existing conditions.

"We are seeing sporadic activity across the state, which indicates small numbers of laboratory-confirmed influenza cases or a single laboratory-confirmed influenza outbreak has been reported, but there is no increase in cases of ILI," Fox explained. She provided a link to their [flu activity report](#) and said, "it runs a week behind for reporting purposes to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)."

"We are asking people to get vaccinated against the flu, to cover their cough, and wash their hands. Also, we are asking people to stay home if they are sick so that illness does not spread," Fox added.

One Child, One Adult Ill in Maryland

One adult and one child have become ill with the first laboratory-confirmed cases of seasonal influenza in Maryland, according to a [news release](#) from the Maryland Department of Health. One patient was identified in the Central region of the state and the other was identified in the Eastern Shore region of Maryland. The confirmed influenza strains are type A (H1) and type B (Victoria).

Experts from across the United States are urging residents to get vaccinated against seasonal influenza.

"The influenza vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and your family from becoming ill with influenza," said Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services Fran Phillips, RN, MHA, in the news release. "Getting vaccinated each year is important because the strains of influenza that circulate change over time. This season, influenza vaccines have been updated to better match the circulating strains."

CDC Says Flu Activity Low Across US

"The first [FluView](#) of the 2018-19 season was published on Friday and will be published weekly on Fridays throughout the season," Ian Branam, MA, health communication specialist, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, CDC, told *Medscape Medical News*. "This report shows that flu activity is low across the United States. The exact timing and duration of flu seasons can vary, but influenza activity often begins to increase in October, so we expect to see an increase in activity in the coming weeks."

"CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get vaccinated between now and the end of October. Annual flu vaccination is the best way to reduce the risk of flu and its potentially serious complications. There are many benefits to vaccination, including reducing your risk of flu illness and serious flu complications that can result in hospitalization or even death," Branam explained.

A [CDC expert commentary](#) on influenza vaccination recommendations is available on *Medscape Medical News*.

For more news, join us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

Medscape Medical News © 2018 WebMD, LLC

Send comments and news tips to news@medscape.net.

Cite this article: Several Influenza Deaths in US, Including One Child, as Flu Season Begins - *Medscape* - Oct 17, 2018.