Flu Season is Upon Us

Keep vaccinating against flu
Flu is on the rise and causing severe illness in many Minnesotans. The current predominant circulating strain in the U.S. and Minnesota is A H3N2, which in the past has been associated with more hospitalizations and deaths in persons 65 and older and young children, compared to other age groups.

We don’t think the season has peaked yet. Even after the peak, there will still be a significant amount of flu circulating and vaccination is still very important.

Here are three key reminders for providers:

1. It is not too late to vaccinate! Continue to recommend flu vaccine until it expires.
   - We do not know the vaccine effectiveness for the circulating strains in the U.S. yet.
   - Reports of low vaccine efficacy from Australia should not discourage providers from recommending flu vaccination to their patients.
   - Vaccination is the best thing a person can do to prevent flu and mitigate its serious effects.

2. Consider flu high on the list of possible diagnoses for ill patients, especially those with upper respiratory symptoms, even if they have been vaccinated.
   - Even in a perfectly matched flu season, the vaccine won’t prevent every case of flu.
   - Use antiviral drugs to treat all hospitalized patients and all high-risk patients with flu symptoms.
   - Antiviral drugs work best when treatment is started within 2 days of illness onset, but clinical benefit has been observed even when treatment is started later.

3. Along with vaccination, remind patients and colleagues to:
   - Stay home if you are ill.
   - Cover your cough and sneezes.
   - Wash your hands often.

Additional 2017-18 flu vaccine available
Flu vaccine for the 2017-18 season is available to order for clinics participating in the Minnesota Vaccines for Children (MnVFC) and the Un- and Underinsured Adult Vaccine (UUAV) programs. Go to Ordering MDH Vaccine (www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/immunize/vaxorder.html) to submit an order.

Resources to have handy
- Flu Treatment (www.cdc.gov/flu/treatment/index.html) Information about neuraminidase inhibitor antivirals (oseltamivir, zanamivir, and peramivir).
- Vaccine Effectiveness – How Well Does the Flu Vaccine Work? (www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/vaccineeffect.htm) Information about flu vaccine effectiveness and factors that affect it.