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NEWS RELEASE

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Widespread Flu Activity in Georgia

Protect Yourself and Prevent the Spread of Flu

ATLANTA – Flu activity is widespread and severe in Georgia, and cases are likely to increase following the holidays and as Georgians return to work and school. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also projects a severe flu season. If you have not gotten a flu shot yet and have no medical conditions preventing you from doing so, the Department of Public Health strongly urges you to take advantage of the health benefits the flu vaccine provides as soon as possible.

The CDC recommends that individuals over the age of six months receive a once-yearly flu vaccine – not just for their own protection, but to protect others around them who may be more vulnerable to the flu and its complications, including the elderly and immunocompromised. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies that protect against flu to develop in the body, so now is the time to get a flu shot. Even if you get the flu, the vaccine can help prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and, in extreme cases, death. You may consult with a healthcare professional (such as a licensed medical doctor, nurse, or other practitioner) if you have questions about the flu shot.

The flu vaccine is widely available at public health departments, doctors' offices, grocery stores, neighborhood clinics, and pharmacies.

Flu symptoms and their severity can vary from person to person and may include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people are at higher risk of developing serious complications if they get sick. This includes people 65 years and older, people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease, pregnant women, and children younger than 5 years, but especially those younger than 2 years old.

In some cases, healthcare providers may recommend antiviral drugs to treat the flu. Antiviral drugs are prescription medications and are most effective when taken within 48 hours of symptom onset.

There are other tried and true measures you can take to help prevent the spread of flu:

- Frequent and thorough handwashing with soap and warm water. Alcohol based gels are the next best thing if you don't have access to soap and water.
- Cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow or arm to help prevent the spread of

the flu.

- Avoid touching your face as flu germs can get into the body through the mucus membranes of the nose, mouth, and eyes.
- If you are sick, stay home from school or work. Flu sufferers should be free of a fever, without the use of a fever reducer, for at least 24 hours before returning to school or work.
- If you are caring for a sick individual at home, keep them away from common areas of the house and other people as much as possible.

For more information about flu and how to prevent it, log on to dph.ga.gov/flu. You can monitor Georgia's weekly influenza reports at <https://dph.georgia.gov/flu-activity-georgia>. The reports are updated on Fridays.