

First Flu Deaths Confirmed in LA County

The first Los Angeles County influenza-associated deaths for the 2015-2016 flu season have been confirmed by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. The two deaths occurred during the final days of 2015. Both decedents had significant pre-existing medical conditions making them especially vulnerable to severe illness from influenza infection. Laboratory testing identified both influenza virus strains as type A. Even though influenza activity locally and across much of the country is still at low levels, these deaths are a reminder that flu is circulating and potentially can cause very serious illness. It is likely that influenza infections will increase as the winter season progresses, so getting vaccinated now will provide the best protection. People at higher risk for severe influenza should seek medical evaluation if they experience an influenza-like illness so that they can be considered for treatment with an antiviral medication. The CDC recommends that people at high-risk for severe influenza who develop a flu-like illness should be considered for antiviral treatment even before it has been confirmed as influenza.

Over the past few weeks, influenza activity in Los Angeles County has increased, though levels are still considerably lower than last season (Table 1). Activity nationally also has been low: pneumonia and influenza mortality levels remain below baseline (Figure 2) and most states continue to report only sporadic activity (Figure 3). Viral subtyping conducted by the CDC has shown that while influenza A (H3N2) viruses were most common since October 1, in the past 4 weeks pandemic influenza A (H1N1) viruses have predominated. This year's vaccine closely matches the current circulating viral strains and should provide good protection against disease. Getting vaccinated for influenza protects the person who receives the vaccine and also reduces the chance that they will become ill and spread flu to family members and friends. This "community protection" is particularly important for those who live in households or work with infants, pregnant women, or people with medical conditions that may reduce their immunity and the elderly.

Table 1. Los Angeles County Influenza Surveillance Summary				
	2015-2016		2014-2015	
	Week 1*	YTD†	Week 1	YTD
Positive Flu Tests/Total Tests (Percent Positive Flu Tests)	171/1,730 (9.9%)	456/19,284 (2.4%)	618/2,487 (24.8%)	1,405/16,525 (8.5%)
Percent Flu A/B	62/38	67/33	96/4	93/7
Community Respiratory Outbreaks	0	4	2	4
Influenza Confirmed Outbreaks	0	0	2	2
Pediatric Flu Deaths‡	0	0	0	0
Adult Flu Deaths	0	2	4	10

*For the 2015-2016 season, week 1 extends from 1/3/16 to 1/9/16
†The influenza surveillance year started August 30, 2015.
‡Confirmed influenza death is defined by a positive lab test, ILI symptoms, and clear progression from illness to death

