



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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FLU UPDATE – DEC. 17, 2003

The San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) reports there has been another death associated with flu, and an increased percentage of people with flu-like symptoms at local emergency departments.

An 88-year-old woman died Dec. 16, at a local hospital, and a rapid test for flu came back positive. The woman is the fourth person in San Diego County whose death was associated with flu.

Hospital emergency departments surveyed by HHSA saw 24 percent of patients for the week of Dec. 7 to Dec. 13 reporting flu-like symptoms. This is up from 18 percent for the previous week's reporting period (Nov. 30 – Dec. 6). Percentages for each hospital are not available.

“The highest percentage of patients reporting flu-like illness in recent years was 24 percent in 1999-2000,” said Nancy Bowen, M.D., San Diego County Public Health Officer. “While we have had some local deaths, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says it is not unusual for flu seasons to vary widely from year to year, and, sadly, for deaths to occur, even among children.” This year's flu season started unusually early, she said.

The percentage of students who were absent from school for any reason from Dec. 8 through Dec. 12 is: Elementary schools, 8 percent absenteeism, compared to 7 percent the previous reporting period (Nov. 30 - Dec. 6); middle/high schools, 20 percent, compared to 11 percent the previous reporting period (Nov. 30 – Dec. 6).

Other deaths associated with flu include a 56-year-old man, an 83-year-old woman, and a 16-year-old boy. There is no confirmation yet that a 13-year-old girl's death was associated with flu; tests are continuing.

HHSA has received 750 additional doses of vaccine from the state for high-risk individuals, including the elderly, children under age 2, and those with chronic diseases. These doses will be available at HHSA's health clinics. For information on health clinics, please call 877-FLU-0202 or go to the San Diego Community Health Improvement Partners Web site, www.sdchip.org.

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