What You Need to Know About Influenza (Flu)

The Polk County Health Department has reported that there has been a large increase in influenza activity throughout the county and the entire state. Some cases of influenza have been so severe that the individuals have been hospitalized. Cases have been reported in all age groups.

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory disease that is characterized by the sudden onset of a high fever, chills, headache, weakness, body aches and a dry cough. Some individuals may also have a sore throat and runny nose. It is spread through the air when an infected individual coughs or sneezes.

The following are steps you can take to protect your child from influenza and to prevent the spread of influenza:

- Keep your child home if he/she is ill. Your child can return to school when he/she has been fever free for 24 hours without using acetaminophen or ibuprofen products.
- Make sure your child is drinking adequate amounts of fluids. It is easy for your child to become dehydrated when battling the influenza.
- Teach your child to cover his/her cough or sneeze with tissue. Learn to cough into your elbow.
- Have your child wash his/her hands often especially after blowing his/her nose or coughing. Use warm water and soap. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can also be used.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (doorknobs, refrigerator handle, phone, water faucets, etc.) when someone in the house has influenza or a cold.
- If you or your child did not get a flu shot, there is still time. Flu vaccine is still available from your physician or at the Polk County Health Department.
- If your child has an underlying medical condition such as asthma or diabetes and becomes ill, it is very important that you contact your physician for advice on treatment and testing.
- Seek medical care if your child develops any difficulty breathing; isn’t drinking enough and becomes dehydrated; is hard to wake up or talk to; is very irritable; or gets better only to become sick again.

If you have questions or want to get vaccine for your child and/or family members, contact your medical provider or the Polk County Health Department at 715-485-8500. More information about influenza can also be found at www.polkcountyflu.com.