SANTA FE – The New Mexico Department of Health announced the death of a 4-year-old Santa Fe County girl who was suffering from a flu-related illness April 21. It's New Mexico's first pediatric influenza death of the 2021-2022 season. Since the start of this flu season, DOH has identified 143 pneumonia and flu-related deaths.

"Our love and heartfelt prayers go out to the family during this difficult time," said Acting Department of Health Secretary, David R. Scrase, M.D. "Children younger than age 5 are at particular risk of flu complications, and the American Academy of Pediatrics advises that all children ages 6 months and older get vaccinated against the flu."

Flu hospitalization rates are higher in New Mexico, especially in children 0-4 years old. The rate of flu hospitalizations in New Mexico is more than double the national rate in this age group and is above the national average overall.

Currently in New Mexico, flu is still spreading in all regions of the state, and respiratory disease activity remains elevated. Flu seasons vary in length year-to-year, peaking most seasons between December and February, but some flu seasons can last as late as May. The percentage of visits to medical facilities for flu-like symptoms has been climbing in recent weeks, even as COVID-19-related visits have fallen to low levels.

"The flu vaccine is safe, effective and can be given alongside other routine immunizations and the COVID-19 vaccine," Scrase said.

As during all flu seasons, the Department of Health recommends everyone six months of age and older get the flu vaccine each flu season. While influenza viruses spread year-round, most of the time flu activity peaks between December and February, but activity can last as late as May. It is especially important for the following groups of people, either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications, or because they live with or care for people at high risk for developing flu-related complications:

Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old

Children aged 6 months through 8 years who have never been vaccinated against flu, or have an unknown vaccination history, should receive two doses of flu vaccine, administered at least 4 weeks apart

Pregnant women (all trimesters), and up to two weeks postpartum

People ages 50 years and older

People of any age with medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, lung or heart disease, and those who are immunocompromised

People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities

People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including healthcare personnel and caregivers of babies younger than six months

American Indians and Alaskan Natives

People who are morbidly obese

In addition to getting vaccinated, NMDOH also recommends certain COVID-Safe Practices that also help prevent catching or spreading flu:

Wash your hands and your children’s hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after contact with other people and before eating

Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve

Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer after blowing your nose, sneezing, or coughing, even if you use a tissue

Stay home if you have fever and/or respiratory symptoms

Ask *your* doctor about antiviral medicines if you seek medical care for the flu. These medicines are most effective if given within two days of your symptoms starting, but may still help even after two days. People who are sick with flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

Fever – though it's important, not everyone with flu will have a fever. Symptoms:

Cough

Sore throat

Runny or stuffy nose

Muscle or body aches

Headaches

Fatigue (tiredness)

Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

To find out more about flu vaccination clinics throughout New Mexico, you can go to HealthMap Vaccine Finder at https://vaccinefinder.org/ or go to the NMDOH *website: http://nmhealth.org/about/phd/idb/imp/fluv/*

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Staff Reports