

December 16, 2009

Stay influenza-free this holiday season

EDMONTON – Influenza is one “gift” you don’t want to give or receive. Alberta Health Services encourages Albertans to protect themselves and their families from illness during the holiday season.

“The holidays are filled with parties and get-togethers,” says Dr. Gerry Predy, Senior Medical Officer of Health with Alberta Health Services. “It’s important to re-connect with family and friends at this time of year, and as we plan for the festivities, we should include vaccination in our preparations. With children out of school and families taking time off, now is an excellent opportunity to get yourself and your children immunized against influenza.”

As the Mass Vaccination clinics are beginning to wind down, Albertans are encouraged to get vaccinated before the holidays. Vaccine is now also available at some pharmacies and some community physician offices.

Dr. Predy says that while influenza is always an issue this time of year, H1N1 has made Albertans even more aware of the importance of prevention. With a third wave of H1N1 infection expected in the new year, the following tips remain key to protecting yourself & your family from influenza:

- **Get immunized.** Immunization is the single best defense against influenza. Albertans who want to be immunized should visit a clinic before the holidays. Visit www.albertahealthservices.ca for clinic dates, times and locations.
- **Cover your cough.** Cough into your elbow or sleeve, or use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Discard the tissue.
- **Wash your hands.** Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Hand sanitizers are also effective.
- **Reduce the spread.** Limit touching your eyes, nose or mouth and wash your hands frequently.
- **Stay healthy.** Eat a healthy balanced diet, avoid cigarette smoke and other harmful substances, stay active and get plenty of sleep.
- **Stay home if you are ill.** If you feel sick, do not attend gatherings and limit unnecessary contact with others. If your symptoms worsen (i.e. shortness of breath, dehydration, worsening fever, cough or weakness), contact your health care provider or visit your nearest health care centre.
- **Disinfect household surfaces.** Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables and surfaces in the bathroom) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

Visit www.albertahealthservices.ca for more information, including vaccination clinic locations and hours. Or, call Health Link Alberta to speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at **780-408-LINK (5465) Edmonton, 403 943 LINK (5465) Calgary or outside the local calling area**, toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465).

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.5 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.