

OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony's: No Reported Cases of Coronavirus Investigated Here, Flu Stats, Preventative Steps Given

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony's Health Center said today there have not been any coronavirus (COVID-19) cases investigated at their location in the Riverbend.

“We are aware of a reporting about a suspected COVID-19 case in Belleville,” Colleen Reynolds, media relations coordinator for OSF HealthCare based out of Peoria said. “I can say to date, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony’s Health Center and related OSF medical clinics have not requested testing and have not put anyone under investigation in the Riverbend as a result of being seen by us.”

Below is a story released that the flu is a much bigger threat in Illinois than COVID-19.

Flu Remains Larger Threat than COVID-19

NOTE: CDC reports flu-related deaths in the U.S. has reached 16,000 with six pediatric deaths in Illinois and two in Michigan. This story was updated 2/26/2020 to reflect updated number of pediatric deaths nationally, including in Illinois and Michigan.

Despite heightened alerts about the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, local health leaders stress the seasonal flu remains far more concerning. The two Illinoisans diagnosed with COVID-19 have recovered and returned to work. Meanwhile, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says flu activity remains high in the US and expected to continue for weeks. The agency emphasizes pediatric deaths, at 105, are the second highest since they were included in weekly reporting in 2004.

In Illinois and throughout the country, health facilities are mostly treating the unusual Influenza B-Victoria strain of flu virus. The last time this occurred was the the1992-1993 season. Terri McCrery, infection preventionist for OSF HealthCare says the numbers affected by the new coronavirus can’t compare to the seasonal flu.

“You’re talking a handful nationally here with the coronavirus and you’re talking millions with the flu so we need to be watchful of the flu,” she warned.

McCrery says this latest flu strain is affecting children most significantly. The overall cumulative hospitalization rate — 47.4 per 100,000 population — is similar to that seen in recent influenza seasons; however, "rates in children and young adults are higher than at this time in recent seasons," the CDC reports.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says there have been increased hospitalizations but fewer deaths from the flu so far this season. Illinois is among the states where the risk remains widespread and high.

Even if you don’t often get sick, McCrery says it only takes one exposure to influenza which is a long-lasting airborne virus. She says the flu can have a devastating impact, even on those considered young and with a healthy immune system.

A 16-year-old junior at Glenwood High School in the Ball-Chatham, Illinois school district died from complications of the flu. Joey Sandhaas, came down with pneumonia and fought for his life for more than a week.

“It’s not too late to get the flu shot. Don’t think you’re going to be one of the ones that it skips by and not get the flu because you could get it and it could be deadly,” she advised.

OSF HealthCare has imposed visitor restrictions at its hospitals because of the elevated risk. The restrictions encourage people to voluntarily limit hospital visits, especially if feeling ill. Visitors 18 and over must wash or sanitize their hands and wear masks available at hospital and medical office entrances.

McCrery also encourages those who have flu-like symptoms to be seen early, especially if they have underlying health issues.

She urges everyone, “Don’t go out in public if you have the signs and symptoms – the fever, the cough, runny nose. Stay home but then if you’re home for a day or two, go be seen. Don’t let it wait. The flu can turn into pneumonia, bronchitis and that would be required to be seen by the doctor so please be cautious.”

Be seen early if you suspect the flu

Anti-viral drugs can be used to treat flu illness. The CDC recommends prompt treatment for people who have flu infection or suspected flu infection and who are at high risk of serious flu complications, such as people with asthma, diabetes (including gestational diabetes), or heart disease.

If you suspect you have the flu, please call ahead to your health care provider including OSF Urgo or OSF PromptCare so staff can take proper precautions to assess you. OSF OnCall is also an online option where you can be connected virtually to be assessed.

Here are tips to know when to seek emergency care for flu-like symptoms.

What should I do if I get sick?

Most people with the flu have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. If you get sick with flu symptoms, in most cases, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people except to get medical care.

If, however, you have symptoms of flu and are in a high risk group, or are very sick or worried about your illness, contact your health care provider (doctor, physician assistant, etc.).

Certain people are at high risk of serious [flu-related complications](#) (including young children, people 65 and older, pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions). This is true both for seasonal flu and novel flu virus infections. (For a full list of people at high risk of flu-related complications, see [People at High Risk of Developing Flu-Related Complications](#)). If you are in a high risk group and develop flu symptoms, it's best for you to contact your doctor early in your illness. Remind them about your high risk status for flu. CDC recommends that people at high risk for complications should get antiviral treatment as early as possible, because benefit is greatest if treatment is started within 2 days after illness onset.

Do I need to go to the emergency room if I am only a little sick?

No. The emergency room should be used for people who are very sick. You should not go to the emergency room if you are only mildly ill.

If you have the emergency warning signs of flu sickness, you should go to the emergency room. If you get sick with flu symptoms and are at high risk of flu complications or you are concerned about your illness, call your health care provider for advice. If you go to the emergency room and you are not sick with the flu, you may catch it from people who do have it.

What are the emergency warning signs of flu?

People experiencing these warning signs should obtain medical care right away.

In children

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish lips or face
- Ribs pulling in with each breath
- Chest pain
- Severe muscle pain (child refuses to walk)
- Dehydration (no urine for 8 hours, dry mouth, no tears when crying)
- Not alert or interacting when awake
- Seizures
- Fever above 104°F
- In children less than 12 weeks, any fever

- Fever or cough that improve but then return or worsen
- Worsening of chronic medical conditions

In adults

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Persistent dizziness, confusion, inability to arouse
- Seizures
- Not urinating
- Severe muscle pain
- Severe weakness or unsteadiness
- Fever or cough that improve but then return or worsen
- Worsening of chronic medical conditions

These lists are not all inclusive. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptom that is severe or concerning.

Are there medicines to treat the flu?

Yes. There are drugs your doctor may prescribe for treating the flu called “antivirals.” These drugs can make you better faster and may also prevent serious complications. See [Treatment – Antiviral Drugs](#) for more information.

How long should I stay home if I’m sick?

CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or other necessities. Your fever should be gone without the need to use a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol®. Until then, you should stay home from work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

CDC also recommends that children and teenagers (anyone aged 18 years and younger) who have flu or are suspected to have flu should not be given Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) or any salicylate containing products (e.g. Pepto Bismol); this can cause a rare, very serious complication called Reye’s syndrome. More information about Reye’s syndrome can be found [hereexternal icon](#).

What should I do while I’m sick?

Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from infecting them. If you must leave home, for example to get medical care, wear a facemask if you have one, or cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Wash your hands often to keep from spreading flu to others.

Here are some frequently asked questions about flu vaccines.

Even healthy people need a flu vaccine. Influenza (flu) is a contagious disease which can lead to serious illness, including pneumonia. Even healthy people can get sick enough to miss work or school for a significant amount of time or even be hospitalized. An annual flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older. Pregnant women, young children, older people, and people with certain chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes and heart disease are at increased risk of serious flu-related complications, so getting a yearly flu vaccine is especially important for them. Is the flu vaccine safe? Yes. The flu vaccine is safe. Hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received flu vaccines over the past 50 years, and there has been extensive research supporting the safety of seasonal flu vaccines.

Each year, CDC works closely with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other partners to ensure the highest safety standards for flu vaccines. The most common side effects of flu vaccines are mild. The flu vaccine cannot cause flu illness; however, it can cause mild side effects that may be mistaken for flu. Common side effects from the flu shot include soreness, redness, and/or swelling from the shot, headache, fever, muscle aches, and nausea.

These side effects are NOT the flu. If experienced at all, these effects are usually mild and last only 1-2 days. Even if I get sick, won't I recover quickly? Not necessarily. Influenza can be serious and anyone can become sick with flu and experience serious complications, including active and healthy kids, teens and adults. Even if you bounce back quickly, however, others around you might not be so lucky. You could spread your illness to someone who is more vulnerable to flu. Some people can be infected with the flu virus, but have no symptoms.

During this time, you can still spread the virus to others. Don't be the one spreading flu to those you care about. National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases Office of Health Communication Science Last Updated November 17, 2016 Page 2 of 2 Can't I wait and get vaccinated when/if flu hits my community? It is best to get vaccinated before flu begins to spread. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the flu, so the sooner

you get vaccinated, the more likely it is that you will be protected once flu begins to circulate in your community. Flu vaccines can't give you the flu. Even if you got a flu vaccine, there are reasons why you might still get flu or a flu-like illness.

- You may have been exposed to a non-flu virus. The flu vaccine can only prevent illnesses caused by flu viruses. It cannot protect against other viruses that may cause symptoms similar to flu, like the common cold.
- You might have been exposed to flu after you got vaccinated, but before the vaccine took effect. It takes about two weeks after you receive the vaccine for your body to build protection against the flu.
- You may have been exposed to an influenza virus that was very different from the viruses included in that year's vaccine. The flu vaccine protects against the influenza viruses that research indicates will cause the most disease during the upcoming season, but there can be other flu viruses circulating.
- Unfortunately, however, some people who get a flu vaccine may still get sick. How well the flu vaccine works (or its ability to prevent flu) can range from season to season and also can vary depending on who is being vaccinated. However, if you do get sick, flu vaccination might make your illness milder than it would have been otherwise don't avoid getting a flu vaccine because you don't like shots.

The minor pain of a flu shot is nothing compared to the suffering that can be caused by the flu. A flu vaccine reduces your risk of illness, hospitalization, and can prevent you from spreading the virus to your loved ones. So, whatever little discomfort you feel from the minor side effects of the flu shot is worthwhile to avoid the flu. You need to get a flu vaccine every year.

There are two reasons for getting a flu vaccine every year: a) Flu viruses are constantly changing and so flu vaccines may be updated from one season to the next. You need the current season's vaccine for the best protection. b) A person's immune protection from the vaccine declines over time. Annual vaccination is needed for the best protection.