



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

## Flu Season Begins: Severe Influenza Illness Reported CDC urges rapid antiviral treatment of very ill and high risk suspect influenza patients without waiting for testing

Influenza activity is increasing across the country and CDC has received reports of severe influenza illness. Clinicians are reminded to treat suspected influenza in high-risk outpatients, those with progressive disease, and all hospitalized patients with antiviral medications as soon as possible, regardless of negative rapid influenza diagnostic test (RIDT) results. Early antiviral treatment works best, but treatment may offer benefit when started up to 4-5 days after symptom onset in hospitalized patients. Early antiviral treatment can reduce influenza morbidity and mortality.

The spectrum of illness observed thus far during the 2015-2016 season has ranged from mild to severe and is consistent with that of other influenza seasons. Although influenza activity nationally is low compared to this time last season, it is increasing; and some localized areas of the United States are already experiencing high activity. Further increases are expected in the coming weeks. Typically, influenza seasons begin with increases in influenza-like-illness and the percent of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories. Those indicators are rising at this time. Increases in severity indicators tend to lag behind. At this time, national surveillance systems that track severity are not elevated, but CDC will continue to watch for indications of increased severity from influenza virus infection this season.

Key messages to treat and prevent the spread of influenza:

- Antiviral medications are a critical tool in preventing influenza-related complications and can be used to halt the spread of illness in setting where there are vulnerable populations
- Clinicians are reminded to treat suspected influenza in high-risk patients, those whose disease is progressing, and all hospitalized patients with antiviral medications.
- Clinicians should also continue efforts to vaccinate patients this season for as long as influenza viruses are circulating.
- Long term care facilities should consider chemoprophylaxis of ALL residents when a confirmed outbreak has been identified in their facility.
- School, long term care facilities, and child care centers are reminded to promptly report outbreaks in their facilities to their local health department\* so that prevention and control measures can be quickly implemented.
- Individuals are encouraged to get an influenza vaccine and take precautions such as covering coughs and sneezes, staying away from sick people, staying home when sick, and washing hands often to stay healthy and stop the spread of viruses.