

**January 30, 2018**

## **People with flu-like symptoms asked to not visit patients**

MOBILE, Alabama — Because of the recent increase of flu activity in Mobile County, many area hospitals have been inundated with patients. The following is a message from the University of South Alabama Health systems regarding visitors with flu-like symptoms:

“Due to the flu outbreak, USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital and USA Medical Center urge people with these symptoms not to visit patients: fever, runny nose, coughing, sore throat, body aches, headaches, chills and fatigue. Those at high risk for the flu — including pregnant women, people with a chronic medical condition, those over 65 and under 12 — are also encouraged not to enter the hospitals except to receive medical care.

“All visitors are encouraged to continue to practice good hand hygiene and other flu prevention habits, such as sneezing and coughing into a sleeve. Ask for a mask when visiting the hospitals, and our staff will be glad to provide one for you. It is not too late to get the flu vaccine.”

Also posting similar recommendations for visitors with flu-like symptoms are Mobile Infirmary, Providence Hospital and Springhill Memorial.

Many emergency rooms and urgent care facilities have also been overwhelmed.

“When people present to the ER and it has been over 48 hours since the onset of symptoms, they become upset because MD’s are not prescribing antivirals,” said Barbara Gibbs, R.N., who oversees the Infectious Disease & Outbreaks division at the Mobile County Health Department.

“Nor are they doing flu tests because they are following the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those with symptoms associated with influenza-like illness and those that do have fever within the 48-hour time frame are being placed on antiviral medications.”

According to the CDC, the key points in fighting the recent flu activity include:

- Getting vaccinated;
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people; While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them;

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- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities (Your fever should be gone for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medicine);
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it;
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way;
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.

The CDC said people with flu can spread it to others up to about 6 feet away. Most experts think that flu viruses are spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth or nose.

To avoid this, people should stay away from sick people and stay home if sick. It also is important to wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick should not be shared without washing thoroughly first. Eating utensils can be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap and do not need to be cleaned separately. Further, frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at home, work and school, especially if someone is ill.

If you do get sick with flu symptoms, call your doctor and take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them. Treatment should begin as soon as possible because antiviral drugs work best when started early (within 48 hours after symptoms start).

Antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious health problems that can result from the flu.

There are three influenza antiviral drugs approved by the Federal Drug Agency and recommended by CDC this season that can be used to treat the flu. These medicines fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from making more viruses in your body. A doctor needs to write a prescription for you to be treated with these antiviral drugs.