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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FLU TAKES HOLD WITH FOUR MORE CASES

To avoid a nasty and potentially fatal illness, Health Department urges residents to get vaccinated

To help you stay healthy this season, get a flu shot immediately, the Westchester County Department of Health urges residents.

Four more county residents have been identified as having had the flu, bringing the total number of laboratory-confirmed cases of flu in Westchester to five. Getting the vaccine is especially helpful this year because the vaccine contains the prevailing strain of flu. That strain is particularly resistant to antiviral medication, so treatment once you have the flu is of limited use.

“Preventing the flu by getting your vaccine now is that much more important this year,” said Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Westchester County Commissioner of Health. “Unfortunately, there is still plenty of time left to catch the flu, since flu season doesn’t peak until later this winter. If you get the vaccine now you can avoid the flu or if you do get it, have a much milder illness than you would have had. I would especially like to remind pregnant women and health care providers to get their flu shots.”

The four new flu cases include a 33-year-old pregnant health care worker who was hospitalized for two days, a 29-year-old man who was sick for a week but not hospitalized; a 24-year-old pregnant woman who was not hospitalized and a 78-year-old man who was not hospitalized. All got the flu in the first week of January and have fully recovered. All but the 78-year-old were not vaccinated.

Typical flu symptoms include fever, body aches, headaches, a sore throat, vomiting and respiratory difficulty. Each year in the U.S., more than 226,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 die from the flu.

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New this year is the recommendation to vaccinate all children age five to 18. As well, the flu vaccine is recommended for all children at least six months old through 18, and for any adult who wants to reduce the risk for becoming ill with the flu or of transmitting it to others. Health care workers and household members and caregivers of infants less than six months old are also advised to get flu shots to help protect those most susceptible to the flu.

People most at risk for complications from the flu include adults age 50 and older, all pregnant women, household contacts and caregivers of children under age five; residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, health-care workers, anyone who has a chronic pulmonary condition including asthma or a cardiovascular disease, including kidney, liver, blood or metabolic disorders, such as diabetes; anyone with a compromised immune system or a condition that compromises respiratory function; their household contacts and caregivers, and those with health conditions that place them at high risk for complications of influenza.

During flu season, try to stay healthy by getting plenty of rest, exercising and eating healthy. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze, Dr. Lipsman said. If you do get a respiratory infection, stay home to avoid spreading your germs. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue away. Clean surfaces you touch frequently, such as doorknobs, water faucets, refrigerator handles and telephones.

For more information, call the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department's web site at www.westchestergov.com/health.