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**WESTCHESTER FLU CASES ESCALATE AT RAPID PACE
Health Department urges residents to get vaccinated now**

With reported cases of the flu doubling and indicating that influenza is spreading its miserable symptoms far and wide, the Westchester County Health Department urges residents to get their flu shot now.

As of January 26, only 20 flu cases had been identified in Westchester, but by February 2, an additional 20 flu cases had been reported, bringing the total number of reported flu cases to 40. Testing and reporting are largely voluntary, so the number of cases is an indicator of flu activity but does not fully represent the number of residents who have had the flu.

“These numbers tell us that the flu is flourishing in Westchester County,” said Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Westchester County Commissioner of Health. “I would like to remind residents, particularly those who are pregnant or age 50 and over to get a flu shot now. Parents with children ages 6 months to 18 years old who have not already had their children vaccinated should do so, too. It is especially important to get vaccinated this year because the prevailing flu strain that is circulating is resistant to antiviral medication, so treatment once you have the flu is of limited use.”

Residents are cautioned that there is still plenty of time left to catch the flu, since flu season often doesn't peak until later into the winter. Those who get the vaccine now can avoid the flu or have a much milder illness if they do get it. Health care providers also should be certain to get their flu shots to prevent spreading the flu to their patients.

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.

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,; residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, , 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. While not necessarily at increased risk for complications of the flu, household contacts and caregivers of children under age five and health-care workers should get the flu shot to prevent spreading the flu to those who are a high risk for such complications.

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.