



SAN BENITO COUNTY

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Healthy People in Healthy Communities

FIRST TWO SANTA CLARA COUNTY RESIDENTS UNDER
THE AGE OF 65 YEARS HAVE DIED FROM THE FLU
Public Health Department Urges: Get Your Flu Shot Before Traveling and
To Protect Vulnerable People

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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County of Santa Clara, Calif. – Two people under the age of 65 years have died of the flu in Santa Clara County. One was an adult and the other a child, and both had unverified flu vaccination status. Flu season in the United States usually starts at the beginning of October each year. However, influenza viruses circulate year-round.

The adult who died had other medical conditions that put the individual at increased risk of severe complications from the flu. The child who died was previously healthy and had recently returned from traveling overseas. This child most likely contracted the influenza virus outside of the United States. Both cases are still being investigated. Due to medical privacy requirements, further details about these individuals will not be released.

During the last flu season (2018-2019), eight flu-associated deaths in people under 65 years were reported in Santa Clara County. For the 2017-2018 season, the most recent national figures available, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that 80,000 people of all ages in the United States died of the flu and its complications. During that flu season, about 80 percent of those who died were unvaccinated.

“Flu and the flu season are predictably unpredictable. It’s too early to say what these two reported deaths may indicate about this flu season,” said County Health Officer and Director of the Public Health Department Dr. Sara Cody. “Getting vaccinated is still the best protection. I get my flu shot to protect myself and others, like my elderly mother. I don’t always enjoy getting my flu shot. Who does? I do it because it could be lifesaving.”

There were 27 cases of severe flu in individuals under the age of 65 reported in Santa Clara County Public Health Department during the 2018–2019 flu season.

“These deaths are an unfortunate reminder that the flu is deadly,” said Dr. Cody. “The child who died of the flu may have contracted the flu virus during international travel. This underscores the importance for all of us to get vaccinated before we travel, especially for trips outside the U.S.”

Flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Symptoms of the flu may be similar to those of the common cold, but are usually more severe. It takes about two weeks for the flu vaccine to become effective.

“I emphasize the importance of getting the flu shot,” said Dr. Gail Newel, Santa Cruz County Health Officer “and get it early— while flu vaccine is recommended for everyone six months and older, it is especially important for pregnant women, children younger than five, adults 65 and older, and those with chronic medical conditions, such as heart disease, asthma, and diabetes. Get vaccinated *as soon as possible every flu season.*”

Health officials advise individuals to take the following steps to protect themselves and loved ones from flu:

- Get the flu vaccine every year.
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your cough and sneezes.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick, and keep your children home when they are sick.
- Stay home until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours.

Symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue. People at higher risk of severe disease who show flu symptoms should contact their medical provider. Medical providers may prescribe antiviral medications that reduce the severity and duration of illness. Antibiotics are not effective against the flu. Individuals are encouraged to contact their health care provider to get their flu shot. The vaccine is also available at pharmacies and retail stores, and it is offered by some employers.

San Benito County Public Health Services provides free flu shots. For more information call San Benito County Public Health Services at (831) 637-5367 or go to the San Benito Public Health Services website: <http://hhsa.cosb.us/publichealth/>.

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