

NEW JERSEY AIDS/HIV/STD HOTLINE

PRESS RELEASE

March 2020

Severe Flu Season Worries HIV Healthcare Professionals Flu Complications Can be Deadly

(Newark, NJ) – According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the 2019-2020 flu season is on track to be one of the worst flu seasons seen in decades. Since the official start of flu season in October; over 19 million flu cases and more than 10,000 flu-related deaths have been reported to the CDC, with many more cases anticipated before the end of the season in May. Although the flu affects everyone even healthy people, the risk for serious flu-related health problems greatly increases for some depending on health and age factors. When sick with the flu, people living with weakened immune systems and other chronic medical conditions are more likely to be hospitalized and die from flu complications than those without chronic medical conditions.

People living with HIV or AIDS have a greater chance of getting sick from flu as well as other bacterial or viral infections. The HIV virus damages the cells in the body that fight infection (immune system). Weak immune systems often allow other illnesses, such as pneumonia, to develop. Pneumonia often occurs among people living with HIV or AIDS who are sick with the flu. Some illnesses may cause health effects that may never go away – they may be permanent. Although it is not possible to eliminate all risks for getting the flu, there are proven action steps one can take to lower their chance of getting sick with the flu and prevent other flu-related illnesses:

- **Get a Flu Shot/Vaccination:** The CDC recommends that high-risk groups, including people living with chronic conditions such as HIV or AIDS, receive the injectable flu shot rather than the nasal spray form.
 - Although it is recommended that everyone get the flu shot early in the flu season, it is never too late to get the flu shot.
 - Flu shots are often offered free of charge and in a variety of settings, including doctors' offices, health clinics, health departments, pharmacies, and by many employers and schools.
 - Getting the flu shot is not only the best way to protect against the flu, it has been proven to reduce the length, symptoms, and complications associated with flu in those who get sick with flu illness.
- **Take action against the flu every day:** Simple, everyday action steps can be incredibly helpful in stopping the spread of flu.
 - Staying too close to someone who is sick greatly increases your chance of getting sick. If you are not feeling well, do not go to work, school, or other public gatherings.
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze.
 - Avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, mouth) during flu season as germs easily spread this way.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Clean and disinfect any surfaces or objects that be contaminated with flu germs.

- **Ask your doctor about flu antiviral drugs:** People living with HIV or AIDS who are sick with the flu or think they may have come in contact with the flu virus should talk to their doctor or healthcare provider about taking flu antiviral medicines.
 - Antiviral medicines can only be given by a doctor, you cannot get them without a prescription. If at high risk for flu illness, they can lower your chance of getting the flu.
 - Flu antivirals are safe to take with prescribed HIV prevention or treatment medicines.
- **Speak to a healthcare professional at the FIRST sign of symptoms:** Unlike the common cold and other seasonal illnesses, flu symptoms usually come on fast and are often severe. Symptoms include high fever, body pains, chills, weakness/tiredness, cough, stuffy nose, sore throat, and headache.
 - It is important for anyone at high risk for complications from the flu see their doctor or healthcare professional and start treatment as soon as symptoms begin. These medicines work best when started early.

New Jersey offers free HIV and other STI services to all state residents via the hotline. Knowing who to call for resources and information is the first step in ending the HIV epidemic in New Jersey. The hotline is staffed by health professionals (doctors, nurses, and pharmacists) available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide free, confidential help via phone at 1-800-624-2377, [text](#), or [chat](#)

- Referrals for testing sites and other related services
- HIV, STI and hepatitis prevention and treatment information
- Side effects from medicines used to treat HIV and other sexually transmitted infections
- Referrals to PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) services
- Counseling and treatment locations
- Partner notification
- ADDP

New Jersey AIDS/HIV/STD Hotline

Healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses and pharmacists) provide telephone consultation for people seeking information about HIV/AIDS, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and other sexually transmitted infections (STI) including hepatitis. Callers receive information tailored to their needs: discussion about prevention tools/methods, referrals for testing sites and other related services, counseling and testing locations, and information on treatment and adverse reactions to medications. The hotline is administered by the New Jersey Poison Control Center and funded by the New Jersey Department of Health, Division of HIV, STD, and TB services.

Rutgers New Jersey Medical School

Founded in 1954, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School is the oldest school of medicine in the state. Today it is part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and graduates approximately 170 physicians a year. In addition to providing the MD degree, the school offers MD/PhD, MD/MPH and MD/MBA degrees through collaborations with other institutions of higher education. Dedicated to excellence in education, research, clinical care and community outreach, the medical school comprises 20 academic departments and works with several healthcare partners, including its principal teaching hospital, University Hospital. Its faculty consists of numerous world-renowned scientists and many of the region's "top doctors." Home to the nation's oldest student-run clinic, New Jersey Medical School hosts more than 50 centers and institutes, including the Public Health Research Institute Center, the Global Tuberculosis Institute and the Neurological Institute of New Jersey. For more information please visit: njms.rutgers.edu.