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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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DATE: January 5, 2012**

## **IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO GET YOUR FLU SHOT**

Ocean County Freeholder Director Gerry P. Little, Liaison to the Ocean County Board of Health, said that the first confirmed cases of seasonal flu have been reported in Maryland, the District of Columbia, and New Hampshire. This is almost 2 months later than last season's first case, which was reported on October 14, 2010."

He continued, "It is just a matter of time until we see confirmed cases throughout New Jersey. We are aware of how contagious influenza is but the Ocean County Health Department (OCHD) wants you to know that seasonal flu shots are still available to anyone over the age of 6 months. The Health Department will be offering seasonal flu shots EVERY Thursday during the month of January (Jan 5, 12, 19, 26) from 3:00 to 6:00PM at its main headquarters at 175 Sunset Avenue, Toms River. In addition, said Freeholder Director Little, now that we have entered the New Year, all children under the age of 60 months who attend a licensed childcare center or preschool facility, need to have had their seasonal flu shot. If not, children may be excluded from the facility.

Flu shots and pneumonia shots are covered by non-HMO Medicare Part B, otherwise each shot costs \$20. If you are under the age of 65 and requesting a pneumonia shot, you need to bring a note or prescription from your physician to receive the shot. Flu vaccines are at no cost for those on Medicaid, other public assistance programs and others who may qualify."

Daniel E. Regenye, OCHD Public Health Coordinator, said, "Influenza or "the flu", is a highly contagious viral respiratory illness that spreads through droplets when those who are infected cough, sneeze, or talk. Symptoms of the flu are usually more severe than the common cold, with fever, chills, headaches, muscle aches, cough, sore throat, fatigue, nausea, or vomiting. Toddlers and younger children are more vulnerable to the flu as their immune systems are less mature. This puts them at a much higher risk of contracting flu complications such as ear infections, bronchitis, or pneumonia. The flu can also make chronic health problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu. Flu can cause serious illness and may even lead to death if left untreated."

He added, "Flu normally occurs during the colder months of the year, during the "flu season;" however, one can contract the flu at any time of the year. The flu usually affects large groups who spend time in close contact with each other, such as in daycare centers, offices, classrooms, hospitals, and nursing homes."

“The key steps toward flu prevention are to get you and your family members vaccinated against influenza, to take everyday preventive measures against the spread of germs, and to take antiviral drugs if necessary,” said Regenye. “A yearly flu shot is the most important step in protecting yourself against the flu. New strains are constantly developing; therefore, it is important that every person over the age of 6 months gets a flu shot EVERY year.

Leslie Terjesen, OCHD Public Information Officer, said, “Some of the side effects of the flu shot are pain and swelling where the shot was given, fever, dizziness, and nausea. Although it may take a couple of weeks for the flu shot to offer its full benefits to a person, influenza vaccines can prevent 70% to 90% of influenza-specific illness. Among the elderly, the vaccine can reduce severe illnesses and complications. This vaccination is the best safeguard against the flu, which has the potential to hospitalize or kill millions of people each year. Although children younger than six months are at high risk of serious complications from influenza infections, they are too young to receive the vaccination; therefore, parents, caregivers, siblings and those in contact with the infant need to be vaccinated.”

Terjesen added, “Protecting ourselves from getting the flu or giving the flu to others is extremely important. We cannot stress the importance of handwashing and covering your coughs and sneezes. Wash your hands often with soap and water and if not available, use hand sanitizer. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people with influenza-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8°C]), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications. Your medical care provider may prescribe an antiviral for the flu; it should be started as early as possible and taken as directed. If you purchase over-the-counter medicines such as cough suppressants, decongestants or antihistamines, make sure you read the labels carefully in addition to the warnings. Also, keep any medicines, including over-the-counter out of the reach of anyone else in the household.”

If you have any questions regarding the flu shot, directions to the Health Department, or concerns about cost, please call 732-341-9700, ext. 7502.

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