



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Annual Stop Flu at School vaccination clinics start today

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i State Department of Health's (DOH) annual Stop Flu at School program begins today and will continue in 177 public schools statewide through Dec. 7, 2018. The voluntary program administers free flu shots to students in kindergarten through eighth grade who are enrolled at participating schools. Approximately 30,000 students are expected to be vaccinated during the eight-week program.

"Vaccination is our best defense against the flu. It can help prevent illness, but more importantly, it decreases the risk of severe illness, which can result in hospitalizations and death," said Dr. Sarah Park, state epidemiologist. "Vaccinating our school-age children will help reduce the spread of flu in our communities and protect those at risk of serious illness, including infants too young to be vaccinated, adults over 65, pregnant women, and those with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes, and heart disease."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends an annual flu vaccination for everyone ages six months and older. Last flu season, CDC reported 180 pediatric flu-related deaths in the United States. Approximately 80 percent of these deaths occurred in children who had not received a flu vaccination.

Dr. Park added, "While there were no influenza-associated pediatric deaths reported in Hawai'i during the 2017-2018 season, flu circulates year-round in Hawai'i and is unpredictable, which is why it is crucial to get vaccinated each year."

The traditional flu season begins in early October and runs through late May. The flu vaccines this season have been updated to provide protection against circulating flu viruses expected to be most common, based on data from the past season.

Since flu can cause severe illness in people of all ages, DOH encourages everyone to talk to their healthcare provider about the vaccine and consider getting vaccinated. For those unable to be vaccinated through the Stop Flu at School program, flu vaccine is available through healthcare provider offices and clinics as well as pharmacies, for those older than age 11 years.

For a list of vaccinating pharmacies statewide, visit the DOH Vaccine Locator online at <http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/vaccines-immunizations/vaccine-locators/>.

DOH also recommends other flu prevention strategies, including staying home when sick, covering coughs and sneezes, and washing hands frequently. For more information about the flu, visit [http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease\\_listing/influenza-flu/](http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease_listing/influenza-flu/).

To learn more about the Stop Flu at School program, go to <http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/about-us/programs/stop-flu-at-school/> or call the Aloha United Way's information and referral line at 2-1-1.

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### **About Stop Flu at School**

Stop Flu at School, Hawai'i's school-located vaccination program, is an innovative partnership between the State of Hawai'i Departments of Health and Education. This program is endorsed by the Hawai'i Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Hawai'i Association of Family Practitioners and is paid for by federal funds and contributions from health insurers.