



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 16, 2024

24-005

Department of Health announces first Hawai'i pediatric influenza-associated death of the 2023-24 season

HONOLULU – The Department of Health (DOH) announced today the first influenza-associated death in a Hawai'i resident under the age of 18 during this influenza, or flu season. The child was an O'ahu resident. Out of respect for the family's privacy, no further information about the child is being released.

"We are always especially saddened to announce the death of a child in our community. Our thoughts and condolences are with the family at this difficult time," said Dr. Kenneth Fink, Director of Health. "If you or your loved ones have not received the flu vaccine this season, I hope you will consider doing so."

Hawai'i has seen a rise in flu cases in recent weeks in combination with rising RSV cases and continued COVID-19 activity. Unlike flu activity in other states, flu transmission in Hawai'i is observed year-round.

Recent studies have shown that flu vaccination decreases the risk of severe disease, emergency department visits, hospitalization, and death. Everyone six months and over can receive an influenza vaccine at pharmacies, clinics, or healthcare facilities. A list of COVID-19 and flu vaccination locations can be found at <https://www.vaccines.gov/>. DOH encourages anyone who is not up to date, or is unsure whether they are up to date, to consult with a pharmacist or healthcare provider about getting vaccinated.

Hawai'i's last pediatric death from influenza occurred in June 2023. During the 2022-23 flu season, Hawai'i recorded four pediatric deaths due to influenza. Nationwide, the CDC has reported 40 influenza-associated pediatric deaths for the current 2023-24 flu season. "As we emerge from the pandemic, we are seeing a return of pre-pandemic flu impacts in the community," said Dr. Sarah Kemble, State Epidemiologist. "Flu vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and others from the flu. It is recommended that everyone six months and older get vaccinated each year."

While vaccination is the best protection against flu, basic prevention measures can also reduce the spread of flu, COVID-19, and RSV. Daily actions such as hand washing, staying home when sick, and covering when coughing and sneezing can help stop the spread of germs and increase your protection. While not required, masking is also still an effective prevention measure for respiratory illnesses. Consider wearing a well-fitted mask in crowded indoor settings or when traveling.

More information about influenza and other respiratory diseases is available at <https://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease-types/respiratory-viruses/>.

#