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GENERAL PUBLIC AND THOSE AT RISK – OCTOBER IS THE TIME TO GET YOUR FLU SHOT
MORGANTOWN, WV – OCTOBER 1, 2016

In the United States, millions of people get sick, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized and thousands to tens of thousands of people die from flu and related complications every year. While it is not possible to predict how severe the 2016-2017 season will be, or which viruses will dominate, one constant is the need for annual vaccination to help decrease the impact of this contagious disease.

On Thursday, September 29, Tom Frieden, M.D., M.P.H., director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), joined by other medical and public health experts, addressed the nation in preparation for the upcoming flu season at a news conference presented by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID)

Dr. Frieden said that “Flu is serious. Flu is unpredictable. Flu often gets not enough respect. Although it is not perfect, the flu vaccine is still our best tool to prevent the flu.” Dr. Frieden went on to say that getting a yearly flu shot cuts the risk of getting the flu in half and if only 5% more Americans were immunized against the flu, flu illnesses would be cut by 800,000 and hospitalizations by 10,000.

Dr. Kevin Ault, representing the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, said that pregnant women can protect their babies and themselves by getting immunized.

Dr. Patricia Whitley-Williams, chief of pediatrics at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and liaison to ACIP representing the National Medical Association, said that each year, about 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized with the flu and that even healthy children can become seriously ill or die.

Dr. Wilbur Chen, chief of the adult clinical studies section in the Center for Vaccine Development at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, said that people 65 and older don’t have the immune response they did when they were younger, so their flu infection tends to be more severe. Those 65 and older represent 50% to 70% of Americans hospitalized with the flu and 70% to 90% of those who die, he said.

CDC recommends that persons 6 months and older get a flu shot. October is considered the best time to get your flu shot because it takes about two weeks after vaccination for protection to set in.

Hopefully, the highlights of this news conference reminds everyone that getting a flu infection can have serious consequences. Consequences not only for those at high risk such as pregnant women, children and those 65 and older but also the general public.
The flu vaccine isn't perfect, and it doesn't guarantee 100 percent that you won't get influenza, but it still remains your best protection against the flu. Make October the month that you and your family protect yourselves from getting the flu by getting a flu shot.

The Monongalia County Health Department offers standard flu shots as well as the “High Dose” flu shot specifically developed for seniors. Individuals and families can call the MCHD to set up an appointment to be vaccinated. The health department is also available to travel to your workplace and vaccinate your employees. To set up an appointment, make arrangements for a workplace visit, inquire about what insurances are accepted or general information call 304-598-5119.

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