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|  | West Central Ohio Region *(Champaign, Clark, Darke, Greene, Miami, Montgomery, Preble, Shelby)* | |
| For Immediate Release 1/6/2020 | | **Contact: Emily Hoisington, BSN, RN (937) 548-4196** |

**Flu is Widespread in West Central Ohio *Flu Cases and Hospitalizations are Spiking in the Region***

Influenza is now widespread within the 8 county West Central Ohio region including: Champaign, Clark, Darke, Greene, Miami, Montgomery, Preble and Shelby counties. Influenza is a very contagious illness that strikes millions of Americans each year. Influenza, unlike the common cold, has a swift onset of severe symptoms beginning with two to seven days of fever, headache, muscle aches, extreme fatigue, and a cough.

Health officials are encouraging residents to protect themselves against the flu by getting vaccinated as soon as possible and by following other preventive actions as flu cases and hospitalizations continue to rise. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone  
6 months and older get a flu shot now, as this is the time of year when there is usually an increase  
in cases.

Through week 52 of the flu season, which ended Dec. 28, there have been 472 influenza-associated hospitalizations and 2,574 outpatient cases reported in the region. However, health officials know the numbers are higher, since many people who are infected with the flu do not go to the doctor.

Getting an annual flu vaccine is the first and best way to protect yourself and your family from the flu. Flu vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, doctors’ visits, and missed work and school, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations.

“It takes a couple of weeks after getting vaccinated for the flu vaccine to take effect,” said Emily Hoisington, Director of Nursing for Darke County General Health District. “With influenza continuing to rise, it is very important to get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect not only yourself but also those around you, especially our vulnerable population – young children, the elderly, pregnant women and those who are immunocompromised.”

Many people in vulnerable groups are also visited by friends and relatives. When their visitors are immunized, that also makes it less likely to spread the flu to them.

In addition to getting a flu shot, the following preventive actions will help you stay healthy this  
flu season:

* Wash your hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based sanitizer when you are unable to wash.
* Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread this way.
* Get plenty of rest. Sleep is shown to help your body fight off illness.
* When you are sick, stay home until you are fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication.
* Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue.

Flu vaccines are offered at the Darke County Health Department Monday through Friday from 8am to 4pm. For more information, call 937-548-4196 x235.

More information about fighting the flu and other germs, [click here](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/everyday-preventive-actions-8.5x11.pdf).