

## **Flu Widespread in NC; Health Director Urges Precautions**

**February 8, 2008—Hendersonville** – Health Director Tom Bridges today said that the flu is widespread across North Carolina, and that county residents should take actions to prevent infection. Flu reports from the North Carolina Laboratory indicate there has been a sharp rise in the number of flu cases statewide. Increased flu activity is being reported in eastern and piedmont portions of North Carolina, so the western region should be prepared for the possibility of more cases here.

“It isn’t too late to vaccinate,” Bridges said. “The health department still has vaccine available.” Vaccination now can still provide protection against influenza this season since different influenza viruses can circulate as late as May. The flu can be a serious illness. Each year in the United States more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and about 36,000 people die from flu. Flu vaccine is available at the Henderson County Department of Public Health. Anyone interested in a flu shot should call 694-6015 for an appointment.

There are also other vital actions you can take to limit the spread of flu infection,” said Bridges. “Wash your hands. Cover your coughs and sneezes, and if you are sick, stay home.” Using alcohol-based hand cleaners if you are not near water is also recommended.

The state monitors influenza-like illness during the flu season. Influenza-like illness is a temperature of 100 degrees or greater and cough or sore throat. Seventy-six health care providers statewide report the number of people they are seeing with these symptoms weekly. Based on those reports, public health experts determine how the flu is progressing across the state.

The latest report is for the week ending Feb. 2. Health care providers reported 4.87 percent of patients seen had influenza-like illness. This is higher than the peak for last year’s flu season. Last year the peak came in late December with three percent of the patients reporting influenza-like illness. The 4.87 percent figure for this year is higher than the peaks for the four previous seasons. However, we still are far below the record-high 7.7 percent recorded during mid-December 2003.

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