**Health care providers and grieving father to Michigan residents: Flu cases are surging, protect yourself and your family by getting your vaccine today**

*National Influenza Vaccination Week is Dec. 5-9*

**LANSING, Mich.** – As Michigan faces its worst flu season in over a decade, immunization advocates are utilizing National Influenza Vaccination Week to urge residents to vaccinate their families as soon as possible. At a virtual roundtable today, a primary care physician, a nurse clinician and a father who lost his young daughter to a fatal flu infection came together to urge Michiganders to become vaccinated.

Warning signs of a severe impending flu season have been prevalent – the southern hemisphere finished its winter with the worst flu season in years. In the U.S., the flu has already hit hard in southern states, with 14 pediatric deaths already this fall. Despite reports predicting an especially severe flu season for 2022-23, only 2.5 million residents of Michigan have received their flu vaccine, far short of the state’s goal to see 4 million vaccines administered before caseloads peak.

People of all ages can become severely ill and even die from flu infection; fortunately, everyone six months or older is eligible to receive the flu vaccine. Even babies and toddlers should receive a flu immunization, as they have not had the opportunity to build any immunity against the flu.

Zachary Yaksich of West Bloomfield founded Alana’s Foundation to create awareness about flu vaccination after he lost his daughter Alana to the flu when she was just five years old.

“Until Alana died, I had no idea the flu could be fatal for young children,” said Yaksich, Alana’s dad. “We miss Alana every single day. Our family was crushed by the flu. This is why it is our mission to help others do everything they can to protect their children. Please get immunized. Get your kids immunized. Flu vaccines really do save lives.”

Dr. Delicia Pruitt, a primary care physician from Saginaw and Medical Director of the Saginaw County Health Department, detailed what she’s seeing in the field, including some patient concerns about RSV, COVID and the flu all circulating simultaneously.

“We are seeing lower than usual vaccine rates for the flu, at exactly the point in time when we need to be seeing vaccines increase,” Dr. Pruitt said. “We have experienced a mitigated flu season the past several years due to COVID precautions, but this year is different. All our data shows a severe flu outbreak ahead. Please, encourage your loved ones to be vaccinated as soon as possible.”

Bethany Skillen, a nurse and the Manager of Geriatrics with Trinity Health Medical Group in Grand Rapids, noted that not nearly enough residents have been vaccinated to protect against what is likely to be a deadly flu season here in Michigan.

“This message is especially critical for the elderly and youngest residents of our state,” Skillen said. “We may be facing the worst flu season Michigan has seen in years. Fortunately, every vaccination is possible prevention of a hospitalization. The best chance we have at reducing flu fatalities in Michigan is for as many people as possible to receive their vaccine before holiday gatherings are in full swing.”

The state set a goal of 4 million flu vaccinations this season. As of this week, just over 2.5 million doses have been administered – nearing 68 percent of the goal.

“As we head into the holiday season and gather frequently indoors, we want people to understand that the possibility of serious illness is elevated, and vaccination is the best prevention,” Dr. Pruitt said. “Don’t just do it for yourself: do it for the youngest and oldest members of your circle who are most at risk.”

Flu vaccines are widely available throughout Michigan and can be scheduled through your primary care physician’s office or a pharmacy. Find the nearest vaccine for you at <https://www.vaccines.gov/find-vaccines/>.

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Data sources:

[Michigan Flu Vaccination Dashboard](https://www.michigan.gov/flu/flu-dashboard)

[CDC Flu Vaccination Dashboard](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluvaxview/dashboard/vaccination-dashboard.html)