

## PRINT-Flu Poses Bigger Threat than New Coronavirus

**Editor's note: The CDC has updated total flu deaths in the U.S. this season has hit 10,000. 2/6/2020**

The World Health Organization has declared the new coronavirus a global health emergency but local health leaders stress the seasonal flu is far more concerning.

In Illinois and throughout the country, health facilities are mostly treating the unusual Influenza B-Victoria strain of influenza. The last time this occurred was 1992-1993 season. Terri McCrery, infection preventionist for OSF HealthCare says the numbers affected by the new coronavirus can't compare to the seasonal flu.

"You're talking a handful nationally here with the coronavirus and you're talking millions with the flu so we need to be watchful with the flu," she warned.

McCrery says this latest flu strain is affecting children most significantly.

She points out, "We're talking 15 million illnesses with the flu, 140,000 hospitalizations and about 8,200 deaths with the flu. We've had 54 children die from the flu and one of those from Illinois unfortunately."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says there have been increased hospitalizations but fewer deaths from the flu so far this season. But, McCrery points out the agency is predicting many more weeks of elevated risk. Illinois is among the states where the risk is considered widespread and high.

Even if you don't often get sick, McCrery says it only takes one exposure to influenza which is a long-lasting airborne virus. She says the flu can have a devastating impact, even on those in their 30s and 40s with a healthy immune system.

"It's not too late to get the flu shot. Don't think you're going to be one of the ones that it skips by and not get the flu because you could get it and it could be deadly," she advised.

OSF HealthCare has imposed visitor restrictions at its hospitals because of the elevated risk. The restrictions encourage people to voluntarily limit hospital visits, especially if feeling ill. Visitors 18 and over must wash or sanitize their hands and wear masks available at available at hospital and medical office entrances.

McCrery also encourages those who have flu-like symptoms to be seen early, especially if they have underlying health issues.

She urges everyone, "Don't go out in public if you have the signs and symptoms – the fever, the cough, runny nose. Stay home but then if you're home for a day or two, go be seen. Don't let it wait. The flu can turn into pneumonia, bronchitis and that would be require to be seen by the doctor so please be cautious."

If you suspect you have the flu, please call ahead to your health care provider including OSF PromptCare or Urgo so they can take proper precautions to assess you.

HERE IS A COMPLETE LIST OF HOSPITAL VISITOR RESTRICTIONS DUE TO FLU RISK

Effective immediately, it is requested that:

- Visitors should be at least 18 years of age and older. This will minimize patient exposure to children, who are known to be high risk for transmission of viral infections, and will also help protect children from contracting an illness while visiting the hospital.
- Individuals who are not feeling well or have had flu-like symptoms in the past seven days should not visit hospitalized patients. Flu-like symptoms include a fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, cough, and/or sore throat.
- When entering and leaving a patient's room, everyone should wash their hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand foam/gel. Washing helps limit the spread of disease.
- People should cough or sneeze into their arm, shoulder, or tissue (not hands) to reduce the spread of germs that can be passed from hands touching surfaces or people.

While the voluntary request is restrictive in nature, the health care community firmly believes the request is in the best interest of patient health and safety.

[Here are some frequently asked questions](#) about flu vaccines.