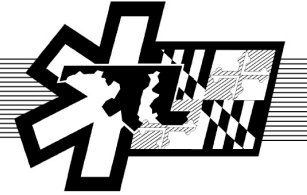


News RELEASE



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Flu Season Causing Overcrowding in Maryland Hospital Emergency Rooms

Baltimore, MD (January 25, 2018) – Maryland hospitals emergency departments are experiencing a major increase in the number of patients, the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS) announced today. Representatives from fire department Emergency Medical Services (EMS) programs, hospital Emergency Departments, and local health departments are monitoring patient volumes at area hospital emergency departments. A hospital Emergency Department that has a temporary overload of patients can request ambulances to transport non-critical patients to another hospital, if possible. Hospital activity normally increases in the winter – the peak season for flu and respiratory illness. The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) has reported widespread cases of influenza/flu illness across Maryland.

“A significant number of patients with flu-like symptoms have been reporting to Emergency Departments across the state,” said MIEMSS State EMS Medical Director Dr. Richard L. Alcorta. “This puts a significant stress on the EMS and hospital-based health care system.”

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends only very sick people should go to the emergency room. Mild symptoms of illness can typically be treated by a primary care doctor, an urgent care center, or at home. This helps reduce the volume of 9-1-1 calls and Emergency Department visits. However, even during times of overload, area hospitals are open and available to treat seriously ill or injured patients.

“Maryland’s emergency care providers are available when you need them,” said Public Health Services Deputy Secretary Dr. Howard Haft, “but please be sure there is a true emergency before calling 9-1-1.”

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MIEMSS and MDH continue to closely monitor Emergency Department overload statewide. Health care officials request individuals get the flu vaccine to reduce influenza. Even though this year's vaccine is not a complete match to the circulating flu viruses, vaccination and staying home when sick are still the best options to reduce the risk of catching or spreading the flu. The flu vaccine can also reduce the severity of symptoms if you do get sick.

If you believe you are ill with influenza:

- Contact your healthcare provider for management of flu symptoms or treatment of any complications. Early diagnosis and treatment can often be effective and may prevent the need for Emergency Department treatment.
- Get rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers and wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Avoid crowded places like shopping malls or public transportation.
- Avoid unnecessary visits to hospitals or other settings where people with other conditions may be severely affected if they contract the flu from you.
- Stay home from work or school whenever possible to avoid spreading the flu to your friends and coworkers.

Stay up-to-date on influenza activity in Maryland by visiting <http://health.maryland.gov/fluwatch> for weekly updates.

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