



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**  
Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH  
*Commissioner*

Bureau of Immunization  
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Queens, NY 11101-4132

March 9, 2015

Dear Colleague:

This is an update from the New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Bureau of Immunization (BOI) on influenza activity and vaccine availability.

Influenza activity in NYC is decreasing. In NYC and throughout the United States, influenza A (H3N2) viruses have thus far been the dominant strain in circulation this season. About two-thirds of the A H3N2 viruses this season are different or "drifted" from the vaccine virus, which may be responsible for the reduced protection provided by this season's flu vaccine. Influenza seasons that are H3N2-predominant are associated with higher hospitalization and mortality. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention surveillance shows that the proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza remains high as of February 28, 2015, and the hospitalization rate for those age  $\geq 65$  years is the highest recorded since this type of record-keeping began in 2005.

Additionally, there have been 110 pediatric deaths in the US, including two in NYC. Use of antiviral medication for treatment of influenza is recommended for persons at higher risk of complications from influenza. For treatment recommendations, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/summary-clinicians.htm>

DOHMH strongly recommends that you continue vaccinating all your patients with flu vaccine as it can offer protection against other circulating strains, including the non-drifted H3N2, H1N1 and B strains, which may become more prevalent later in the season. Outbreaks of influenza have occurred as late as May. For providers who need an additional supply of flu vaccine, the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program has vaccine available for order. To place your order through the Online Registry, go to [www.nyc.gov/health/cir](http://www.nyc.gov/health/cir). You may call 347-396-2489 or contact [nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov](mailto:nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov) for assistance. Providers needing to purchase vaccine for privately-insured patients can find ordering information through the Influenza Vaccine Availability Tracking System (IVATS) at <http://www.izsummitpartners.org/ivats/>.

Flu vaccine is now being pre-booked for the 2015-16 influenza season. We encourage providers to assess the doses needed for all patients and contact the vaccine manufacturers and/or distributor as soon as possible to order vaccine. BOI has pre-booked VFC flu vaccine for the 2015-16 season and information about placing orders will be sent in late summer. Please note that we have ordered only quadrivalent flu vaccine products.

We thank you for helping to protect New Yorkers against influenza. Additional information on influenza can be found at [www.nyc.gov/flu](http://www.nyc.gov/flu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane R. Zucker".

Jane R. Zucker, MD, MSc  
Assistant Commissioner