Riverside University HEALTH SYSTEM

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Public Health Officials Confirm First Flu-Related Death and Early Start to the 2026-27 Season in Riverside County, Advise Vaccination

RIVERSIDE, CA (Nov. 3, 2026) – The 2026-27 flu season is underway as health officials with Riverside University Health System - Public Health (RUHS - PH) report the first influenza-related death and remind residents that vaccination is one of the best ways to protect against flu and other respiratory viruses.

The individual who died, a man over 65, resided in Western Riverside County. "This death is a sad reminder of the dangers that influenza can pose, especially to older adults, younger children and those with underlying conditions, and the impact it can then have on our Riverside County families who suffer the loss," said Riverside County Health Officer Dr. Jennifer Chevinsky. "Vaccination is the single best prevention strategy to protect us and our loved ones from severe disease caused by the flu."

While cases usually ramp up around Thanksgiving and the winter holiday travel season, current data, including emergency department visits, hospitalizations, laboratory testing and wastewater testing, indicates that influenza is increasing rapidly and has recently reached the "very high" threshold.

Influenza can be serious for everyone, but especially for individuals considered at-risk for severe disease, including adults over 65 years, children under 5 years, pregnant women and those who are immunocompromised or have certain health conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease.

Flu can lead to extended illness with uncomfortable symptoms such as cough, fever, sore throat, stuffy nose, muscle aches and fatigue. Flu spread can also lead to missed school days, lost work wages and out-of- pocket medical costs.

Vaccination reduces complications, minimizes life interruptions and offers protection for all.

“With the early rise in cases, now is the time to make sure you are protected against influenza. Vaccination is safe and flu vaccines are widely available. Treatment is also available if you have been exposed to or diagnosed with the flu,” Dr. Chevinsky said.

According to the California Department of Public Heath, everyone over 6 months of age should receive the flu vaccine each year.

In addition to vaccination, the public is encouraged to take the following steps to protect themselves and others against flu, COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses:

- Wash hands thoroughly and frequently.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Stay home from work or school when sick.
- Consider indoor masking in crowded places.
- Improve ventilation by opening windows or moving events outdoors.
- Disinfect frequently used surfaces.

Those at higher risk who have been exposed or are sick should get tested and talk with their healthcare provider about treatment options.

Vaccines can be accessed at your healthcare provider’s office and many local pharmacies. Public Health vaccination clinics can be found here.

Flu season typically runs from October to April.

To learn about influenza in Riverside County, visit Respiratory Viruses | Riverside University Health System (ruhealth.org).

For more information: RUHealth.org/ruhs-public-health.

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About Riverside University Health System – Public Health

Riverside University Health System – Public Health (RUHS - PH) serves as Riverside County’s public health department. RUHS-PH offers a range of services and programs to promote and protect the health of all county residents and visitors in service of the well-being of the community. RUHS includes the 439-bed Medical Center in Moreno

Valley, Calif., 14 Community Health Centers across Riverside County, and Behavioral Health, which provides emergency and inpatient psychiatric care.
Visit www.ruhealth.org to learn more.