
HEALTH DEPARTMENT
NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Early Cluster of Flu-Like Illness Confirmed as H1N1 Strain

GRAND RAPIDS – The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) have identified the strain of influenza that has now sickened approximately 120 people who attended a convention in Grand Rapids. Results obtained from Michigan residents yesterday confirms three positive cases of Influenza A (H1N1).

KCHD began receiving phone calls and emails from people in at least 25 states who had attended a convention of The National Rural Letter Carriers' Association held in Grand Rapids the week of August 12, 2018. The resulting investigation led KCHD to test five people, three who attended and two people related to one of those. Three of those tests were confirmed as positive for the H1N1 strain by MDHHS on Thursday, August 23. Tests conducted by other health agencies have also confirmed the H1N1 strain in other states.

H1N1 is the same flu that emerged in 2009 and has been circulating ever since. H1N1 has been part of the flu vaccine since 2010. "This serves as a good reminder that influenza is unpredictable, and the best defense is to always practice good health habits to reduce your risk of getting sick," says Brian Hartl, Epidemiology Supervisor at KCHD. "Practicing proper hand washing and getting the seasonal influenza vaccine is the best advice we can give to prevent the flu."

Normally "flu season" is thought to be from October through April. This early detection of this cluster of illnesses should serve as a reminder that "the flu" can happen any time of the year.

"While we can't predict what this influenza season will be like, this may possibly signal that we will see an earlier start this year," adds Hartl.

Symptoms include cough, fever, body aches and sometimes extreme fatigue. Most people who get the flu will recover in a few days. The illness is especially serious for those who are 65 and older, people of any age with certain chronic medical such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease. Pregnant women and young children are also at higher risk of flu related complications.

This particular incident shows how quickly the flu can spread among people who are in close contact. Staying home when you have flu-like symptoms can help stop the spread of the flu to others.

For more information you can visit the KCHD website [Stick it to the flu.com](http://www.kentcountymi.gov/health).

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 265 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.