



Jan. 16, 2014

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Man, child who died tested positive for influenza

A man and child from different parts of Riverside County who recently died have tested positive for influenza, becoming the second and third flu-related deaths of the influenza season.

The man, 63, and girl, 9, died recently after being hospitalized, according to Barbara Cole, director of disease control for the Riverside County Department of Public Health. The man died this week and tested positive for the H1N1 strain, Cole said. The girl died earlier this month and the strain of influenza for her has not yet been determined.

Both had underlying health issues that may have contributed to their deaths, Cole said.

The man is from the western county, which includes the cities of Riverside, Corona, Jurupa Valley, Eastvale and Moreno Valley. The child is from mid-county, which includes the cities of Banning, Beaumont, Calimesa, Idyllwild, Hemet and San Jacinto.

News of the deaths comes about a week after health officials announced the first flu-related death of the influenza season, which started in October. In that case, a 30-year-old Coachella Valley man died after being briefly hospitalized. The man's medical records do not indicate he had received a flu shot, which can be effective against the H1N1 strain, Cole said. It is unknown whether the man or child had received their flu shots.

Since October, Riverside County has had 21 severe influenza cases reported, which included hospitalization in the intensive care unit. There were four flu-rated deaths in Riverside County last flu season.

“The severity of the flu season can vary from year to year,” said Cole, pointing out the three deaths do not appear to be related. “Getting the flu vaccine is one way of protecting yourself, regardless of the severity of influenza.”

Officials emphasize there are ways to reduce the chances of catching the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that everyone 6 months and older receive a flu vaccination each year.

Effective hand-washing and properly covering coughs and sneezes also helps to prevent the spread of flu. Those ill with cough and fever are encouraged not to go to work or school so to limit exposure of co-workers and classmates.