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Riverside County health officials confirm first flu-associated death of the year

A 47-year-old man who recently died tested positive for influenza, and health officials say it is the first flu-associated death of the flu season in Riverside County.

The man, who is not being identified and lived in western Riverside County, died last week after being hospitalized, according to Dr. Cameron Kaiser, Riverside County public health officer. Officials say the patient had other underlying health issues that contributed to his death.

Officials have not determined whether the patient had received a flu vaccine. There were 26 flu-related deaths in Riverside County during the 2014-15 flu season. During the current flu season, Riverside County health officials have reported normal levels of influenza-like illnesses. Statewide, flu activity is within normal levels.

Officials emphasize there are ways to reduce the chances of catching the flu. Influenza vaccination is important and is the most effective protection against flu viruses, Kaiser said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that all persons 6 months of age and older receive a flu vaccination each year.

"It's a tragic reminder that flu can still be fatal, and flu deaths aren't rare," said Kaiser. "Flu shots are cheap and safe, and nearly everyone can get one. That way you may not get sick in the first place."

There is still time to get vaccinated against the flu. To get more information about flu shots, go to www.rivcoph.org

Even in years where the flu vaccine is not a good match for the viruses that are circulating, it's still much better protection than going without it, Kaiser said. Officials with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have predicted the flu vaccine will be a good match for this year's influenza virus.

Effective hand washing and proper covering of coughs and sneezing also help to prevent the spread of flu. Individuals who are ill with cough and fever are encouraged not to go to work or school to limit exposure of co-workers and classmates.