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**State Health Officer says less than 1,500 flu cases reported have been confirmed;
Encourages vaccination**

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources is continuing to monitor influenza activity across the state. While illness containing flu-like symptoms is widespread, there have only been 1,393 reported confirmed cases this season.

State Health Officer and Commissioner for Public Health Dr. Marian Swinker said, “While flu is reported to be widespread across the state, West Virginia’s data indicates 1,393 confirmed cases. The important health message right now for the public is that influenza is preventable.”

The Bureau for Public Health’s Division of Epidemiology and Prevention Services tracks influenza-like illness weekly through various health care providers located across the state. These clinics report the total number of ill persons that have sought treatment at their facility because they were experiencing symptoms that include fever and/or sore throat or cough, or what is called influenza-like illness (ILI). A person with ILI may have the flu, a common cold, or any of a number of different circulating viruses that could make someone ill. ILI is not a confirmed case of flu.

Confirmed cases of flu are laboratory- tested and -verified as influenza virus and they are tracked separately. Dr. Swinker said, “State data indicate that 15,306 individuals reported to their provider with ILI in December and 4,389 in January, which is not remarkable considering the current widespread influenza activity the state is seeing. ILI is not only just caused by flu but also can be winter colds or other viruses that are circulating. Even though we have less than 1,500 cases reported of confirmed flu, prevention is key. The best tool that we have available to protect ourselves and our families from flu is to get a flu shot. It is never too late to get your flu shot. Being vaccinated coupled with covering our coughs and sneezes, discarding used tissues, washing our hands frequently and staying home from work or school when we are ill, will go a long way in helping reduce the spread of illness.”

To learn more about influenza in West Virginia or to see the data for this week, go to <http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/oeps/disease/flu/Pages/fluSurveillance.aspx>