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PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

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Maricopa County Confirms First Flu Death of 2015-16 Flu Season

PHOENIX (Dec. 15, 2015)--Maricopa County Department of Public Health (MCDPH) is confirming its first death due to flu this season, a woman in her late 70's with underlying medical conditions who had been hospitalized.

"Influenza is a big deal. Every year, right here in our community, hundreds of people will die from complications caused by the flu, and thousands will be hospitalized," says Dr. Bob England, MCDPH director. "Getting your flu shot is as much about community protection as it is about personal protection. While we're protecting ourselves when we get the shot, we're also preventing the flu from spreading to our family and neighbors."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months and older get the flu vaccine. At a minimum, the flu vaccine offers protection against three different flu viruses—an H3N2 virus, an H1N1 virus and at least one influenza B virus. While there's no guarantee how effective the vaccine will be, the CDC is predicting a better match this season to circulating strains than last year. For those who do end up falling ill with the flu and are vaccinated, the vaccine has shown to reduce symptoms and prevent more serious complications, such as pneumonia and hospitalization. Additionally, the vaccine you receive offers benefits to those around you, especially those at high risk.

"In other words, if you live with Grandma, in order to protect her, it's more important for you and everyone else around her to be vaccinated than it is for her to get the vaccine herself," says Dr. England. "And if you don't live with an elderly person, or an infant, or an asthmatic child, or someone with diabetes, you can bet that your coworkers or clients or neighbors do. Don't let yourself be a link in the chain that leads to someone's death."

It is estimated that 20-60 percent of people infected with flu don't even know it and may still spread it. Good health habits, such as covering your cough, frequently washing your hands with soap, and staying home from work or school when sick, can help prevent the spread of the flu and other respiratory illnesses.

It's not too late to get vaccinated. Visit StopTheSpreadAZ.org for flu shot locations.

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