

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health Departments Gearing Up to Combat Seasonal Illnesses

Health departments in Cuyahoga County are asking everyone to pay special attention to personal hygiene to prevent the spread of a gastrointestinal illness and influenza (flu) that typically increases during this time of the year. **“These two illnesses lead to countless missed work days and school days, resulting in loss of time and productivity”**, said Matt Carroll, Director of the Cleveland Department of Public Health.

Norovirus, often referred to as “stomach flu” causes nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach cramps. It is very contagious and can easily be spread from person to person through stool and/or vomit of infected persons. This can occur by direct contact with someone who is ill or through food that is prepared by someone who is ill. The symptoms usually last 1 to 2 days and most people recover without any problems. It is important for people with norovirus to drink plenty of liquids to avoid dehydration.

Norovirus is often confused with influenza (or the flu) which affects the upper respiratory system such as the nose, throat, and lungs. Symptoms of the flu include sudden onset of body aches, fever, and respiratory symptoms such as cough, sore throat, or runny nose. The flu is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes into the air and other people inhale the virus. Most people who get the flu recover in one to two weeks, however some people can develop life-threatening complications. Annually approximately 36,000 die in the United States from the flu or related complications. The flu season usually begins to increase during the holidays and typically peaks in late January into February.

“Two easy and important measures people can take to protect themselves from norovirus and the flu are to frequently wash your hands and to cover coughs and sneezes. It is also important for persons who are ill to stay home to reduce the risk of spreading these types of illness to others”, said Terry Allan, Health Commissioner for the Cuyahoga County Board of Health. **“People should also get their annual flu shot for added protection against the flu”**, added Dr. Scott Frank, Health Commissioner of the City of Shaker Heights Health Department.

The general public can visit their local health department websites or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at: www.cdc.gov for information on norovirus and the flu. Flu shots can also be obtained by contacting their local health departments. For the Cuyahoga County Board of Health contact the vaccine clinic by calling (216) 201-2041. For the City of Cleveland, call (216) 664-3609, and for the City of Shaker Heights, call (216) 491-1480.

