



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Sept. 27, 2018**

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## **Oklahoma HMO provides information for influenza, pneumonia awareness**

*September is the start of the Oklahoma flu season; a record number of flu-related deaths in 2017-2018 season*

**OKLAHOMA** – Influenza, also known as the flu, and pneumonia are two major health concerns currently facing the public. These respiratory illnesses can cause mild to severe sickness, with serious outcomes resulting in hospitalization or death, especially in older people, younger children and those with certain health conditions, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

In Oklahoma, there were a record number of flu-related deaths in the 2017-2018 flu season, which started Sept. 1, 2017, with 4,827 cumulative hospitalizations and/or deaths, according to the Oklahoma State Department of Health. GlobalHealth, an Oklahoma-based health maintenance organization (HMO), is providing information to help educate Oklahomans on the importance of influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations, as well as the risks associated with forgoing these vaccinations.

“It is very important to protect yourself and your children from becoming sick, especially as this year’s flu season begins,” said Dr. Wesley Williams, medical director at GlobalHealth. “One of the most effective ways to prepare your immune system to fight unwanted bacterial and viral infections is by being vaccinated against them. Receiving your flu shot each year and speaking with your primary care physician (PCP) about current pneumococcal guidelines are two big steps toward helping protect yourself and others around you from these infectious diseases.”

GlobalHealth is providing the following information to help Oklahomans prevent and treat influenza and pneumonia:

**What is influenza?** Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and sometimes the lungs, according to the CDC. Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. During flu season, flu viruses circulate at higher levels in the U.S. population. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a vaccine each year.

**How do flu vaccines work?** Vaccine manufacturers grow the viruses in a lab, using different methods to ensure you will not contract the flu directly from the vaccine. The main purpose of a vaccine is ensuring your body knows what to look for in case you get the virus. Since there are different versions of the flu vaccine each year – because the virus is constantly changing – it is important to consult with your PCP to find the right influenza vaccine.

**What is pneumonia?** Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs that happens when your air sacs fill with puss and other liquids, blocking oxygen from reaching the bloodstream. Influenza is a common cause of pneumonia, especially among younger children, the elderly and pregnant women. The flu and pneumonia were the eighth leading cause of death in the U.S. in 2015, according to the American Lung Association.

**How do pneumonia vaccines work?** Just as vaccine manufacturers produce the flu shot, pneumonia vaccines are produced by growing the bacteria in a lab setting. There are currently two pneumonia vaccines offered in the U.S., so the best way to find out which one is best for you and at what time you should receive a vaccine is to speak with your PCP.

**Flu and pneumonia prevention.** Beyond getting vaccinated, try to avoid close contact with sick people and while sick, limit contact with others. The CDC recommends staying at home for at least 24 hours after a fever. Also, be sure to cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze, wash your hands often with soap and water, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and disinfect surfaces that may be contaminated.

### **About GlobalHealth**

GlobalHealth is changing health insurance in Oklahoma. As an industry leader, GlobalHealth is an Oklahoma-based health maintenance organization covering 44,000 individuals in all 77 Oklahoma counties. Working proactively with our members, GlobalHealth engages a personalized management plan to address their specific needs and ensure the best possible health outcomes. GlobalHealth utilizes cutting edge, predictive data technology as a foundation to deliver improved healthcare as part of its commitment to making health insurance more affordable. Its membership includes state and education employees, federal employees, municipal employees and Medicare Advantage members. GlobalHealth employs more than 225 associates throughout Oklahoma. To learn more, visit [www.GlobalHealth.com](http://www.GlobalHealth.com).

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