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**State health officials urge proactive steps to keep flu, other viruses away**  
*No confirmed or suspected cases of Enterovirus D68 in Alaska*

ANCHORAGE — With children back in school, health officials are urging Alaskans to be extra vigilant in preventing the spread of respiratory viruses. “This is the time of year when cold virus activity starts picking up again,” said Dr. Michael Cooper, infectious disease program manager for the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. “And influenza season is just around the corner.”

Although Alaska has not yet had any confirmed cases of the Enterovirus D68, which has caused hundreds of illnesses in the Lower 48, “more and more states are reporting cases, and it would not be surprising if the virus is detected in Alaska soon,” Cooper said.

Infection occurs through close contact with someone infected with the virus or by touching your mouth, eyes, or nose after contacting a contaminated surface. Enterovirus D68 infections can range from mild to severe. Symptoms include runny nose, fever, sneezing, coughing and body aches. In more severe cases, patients can develop difficulty breathing and wheezing. Children with asthma, especially under the age of 5, are at higher risk for severe illness. There is no specific treatment for Enterovirus D68 infections other than supportive care, and no specific antiviral medications are currently available.

State health officials emphasize the importance of protecting yourself and others from respiratory illness this year through the following good hygiene practices:

- Get a flu shot early this fall.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds (alcohol hand gel is not as good as hand washing with soap and water).
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid kissing, hugging and sharing cups or eating utensils with people who are sick.

- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys and doorknobs, especially if someone is sick.
- Children and adults with asthma should be sure to have their asthma symptoms under control and see a health care provider if they develop a respiratory infection and their asthma worsens.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Do not go to day care, school, or work while ill.

For additional information about EV-D68, see the Alaska Public Health Alert Network advisory available at: [http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/phan/AKPHAN\\_20140912\\_EnterovirusD68.pdf](http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/phan/AKPHAN_20140912_EnterovirusD68.pdf) and consult the CDC Enterovirus D68 website at <http://www.cdc.gov/non-polio-enterovirus/about/EV-D68.html>.

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