

ONEIDA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Sanitary Code Requiring Health Care Workers' Masks In Effect *Commissioner of Health: "Influenza Prevalent In New York"*

The new provision of the New York State Health Law requiring some health care workers who have not been vaccinated against influenza to wear surgical masks in patient areas is now in effect, Phyllis D. Ellis, Director of Health for Oneida County announced today.

"Under Section 2.59 of the State Sanitary Code, once influenza has been declared prevalent in the state those health care workers in hospitals, residential facilities and agencies who have patient or resident contact and have not had a flu vaccine must wear surgical or procedure masks while performing their duties," Ellis said. She continued, *"The State's Commissioner of Health has issued this order which goes into effect immediately and remains in effect until such time it is determined influenza is no longer prevalent throughout the state. Patients and those visiting hospitals, doctor's offices and nursing homes or persons receiving home care might expect to see some personnel wearing masks."*

Ellis stressed that while the number of confirmed cases of influenza in Oneida County remains low at this time, the Commissioner's order applies to the entire State of New York and not individual counties. So far, only 19 confirmed cases of influenza have been reported in Oneida County in 2013 as compared to more than 1400 cases reported at this time last year.

The flu vaccine is available through the Oneida County Health Department clinic sites in Utica and Rome as well as many area retail pharmacies. Flu vaccine is available on Mondays and Thursdays from 1:00 to 3:30 pm at the 406 Elizabeth Street site in Utica and on Tuesdays from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at 300 W. Dominick Street in Rome. No appointments are required.

"It's not too late to get a flu shot," Ellis said. *"Flu season in our area generally peaks in late January and February and the vaccine remains your best protection against the flu."*

Ellis reminded everyone that it takes two weeks to develop immunity after receiving the flu vaccine and urged everyone 6-months of age and older who has not gotten the flu vaccine to do so as soon as possible. She further reminds everyone that they can help stop the spread of flu by washing their hands properly and frequently, covering their coughs and sneezes using the bend of their arm and staying home from work or school if they experience symptoms of the flu including a fever and respiratory illness.

For more information on influenza or the flu vaccine visit the department's web site at www.ocgov.net or phone (315) 798-6400.