



# **CHCHD News**

**Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department**

<http://health.hamiltontn.org>

*For more information, contact  
Jennifer Hart Yim, PIO  
(423) 209-8238, 315-3987  
JenniferY@hamiltonTN.gov*

For Immediate Release  
September 24, 2009

## **Flu Surveillance Indicates Significant Flu in Hamilton County**

Chattanooga, TN- The flu has already arrived in Hamilton County and the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department's flu surveillance efforts are in full swing. The Health Department utilizes various data sources to establish a more complete picture of flu in Hamilton County. Because it is not necessary or recommended to test each person with flu-like symptoms, influenza-like illness (ILI) counts are used to track flu in Hamilton County. ILI is characterized by fever greater than 100 degrees and cough or sore throat (in the absence of a known cause). Novel H1N1 influenza and seasonal influenza are both included in ILI surveillance efforts.

"Illness surveillance, and specifically flu surveillance, is not new this year," says Sarah Stuart Chewning, Epidemiologist for the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department. "The Health Department has used surveillance in various forms in years past to help determine illness trends and burdens in the community, but this year surveillance is more important than ever." Monitoring illness trends helps health officials, healthcare providers, and community members prepare and respond to increased community-wide illness.

Flu surveillance efforts include data from area hospitals and local healthcare providers. It is important for Hamilton County residents to stay informed about illness trends in the community. Awareness about community trends can help residents better protect themselves and their families. Surveillance data will be posted on the Health Department's flu website and updated weekly. Community members are encouraged to visit the Health Department's site regularly to view the latest data and information.

The Health Department's website provides flu surveillance data in two charts; both charts will be updated weekly. One chart includes area hospital surveillance data and the other includes local healthcare provider surveillance data. The hospital surveillance data chart provides information regarding three of the primary indicators of flu: upper respiratory illness, fever and ILI. The local healthcare provider chart provides counts of ILI in our community by year. This chart includes ILI data for this year as well as the past three flu seasons. These charts are intended to provide illness trend information in our community.

Currently, the data indicate very significant flu in our community, and it is likely to continue. Some of the very early high numbers may be due in part to increased reporting, but it is very clear that flu is here and it is circulating in Hamilton County now.

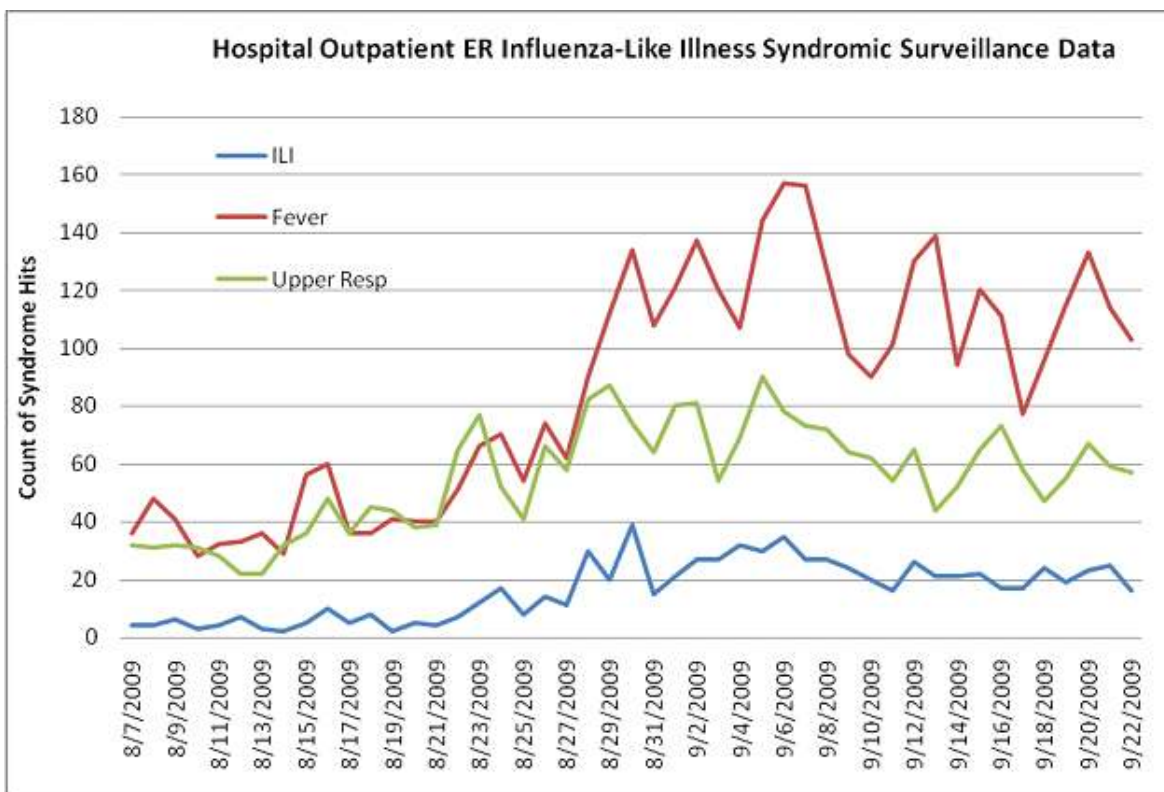
"Flu will likely come in waves this year and it is very difficult to predict when a wave will begin or end," said Ms. Chewning. "It is very important that the community stay informed of the current situation and

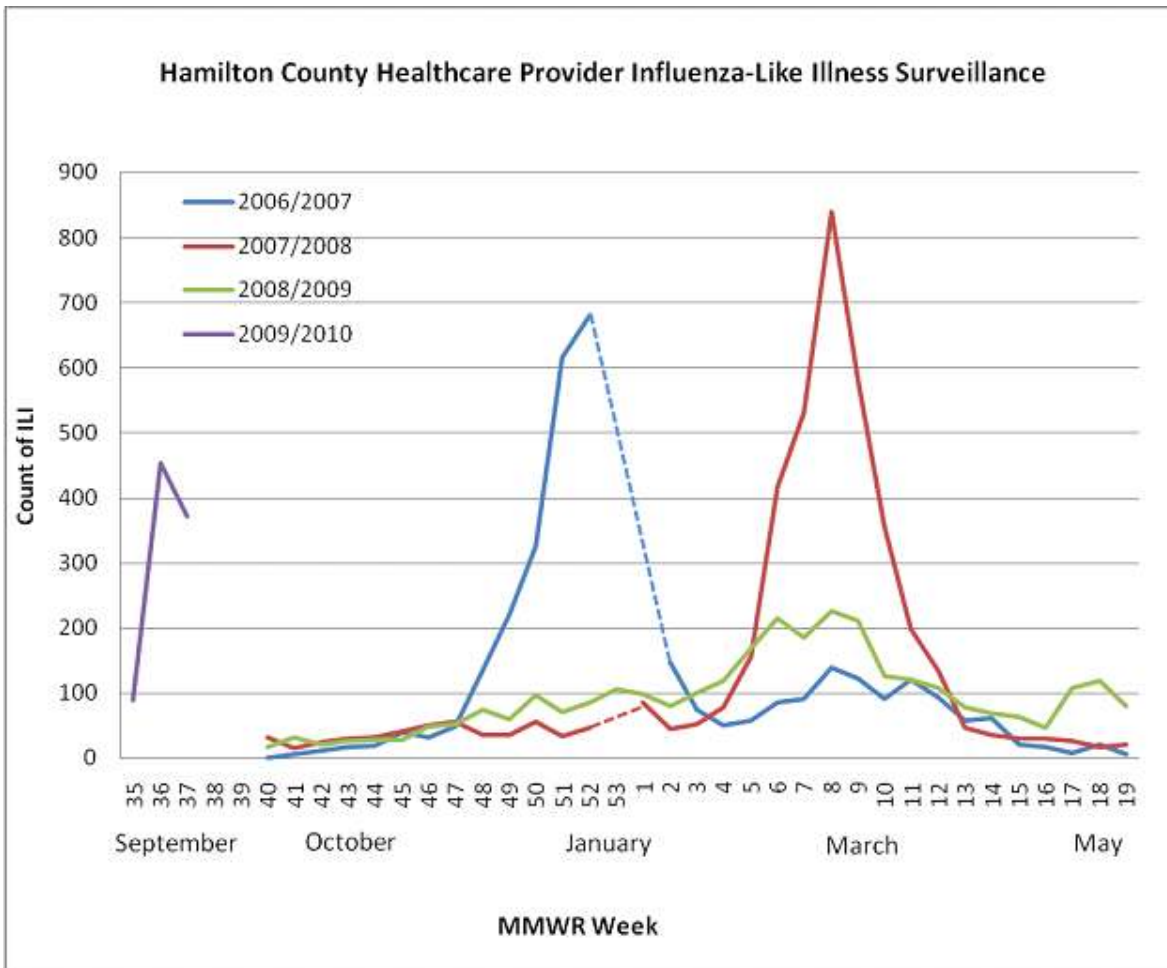
practice measures designed to decrease the spread of illness, like handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, staying at home when you're sick, and getting vaccinated against seasonal flu and the H1N1 strain as the vaccine becomes available."

The Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department encourages residents to be aware of flu in the community and to use the available surveillance information on the county and state websites to stay informed. To view Chattanooga-Hamilton County surveillance data, visit <http://health.hamiltontn.org/swineflu.aspx> (also see attached charts for recent activity). Tennessee surveillance data is available at <http://health.state.tn.us/H1N1.htm>. For more information about flu surveillance, contact the Health Department at 209-8090.

###

The following are the most recent Health Department flu surveillance charts:





**Note: Prior to 2009/2010, flu season data collection began on MMWR week 40. Due to the early start of flu this year, comparison data is not available for MMWR weeks 35 to 39.**