

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY CONFIRMS
GEORGIA'S FIRST CASE OF SEASONAL FLU

ATLANTA (GA) – The State Public Health Laboratory (PHL) confirmed today the first positive influenza virus case of the 2008/2009 flu season. The specimen was sent to the PHL by an outpatient influenza-like illness volunteer provider. The patient is from Thomasville, Georgia.

Other Georgia residents may have been diagnosed with the seasonal flu already but the Georgia Division of Public Health (GDPH) only tracks the cases confirmed by the PHL.

“The most effective way to prevent or lessen the severity of the seasonal flu is to get a flu shot. It is not too late to get vaccinated since flu season in Georgia typically peaks in February,” said Dr. Sandra E. Ford, interim director of the GDPH.

Georgia residents can contact their local public health department or private practitioner to inquire about availability and cost of the vaccine in their area.

The first Georgia confirmed case arrives during National Influenza Vaccination Week and National Handwashing Awareness Week.

“Other simple steps anyone can follow to avoid getting sick is practicing proper hand washing techniques such as rubbing your hands with soap vigorously for about 20 seconds, covering coughs or sneezes with the crook of the elbow and disposing of tissue paper immediately,” added Ford.

Influenza is a respiratory illness characterized by high fever (102 degrees or greater), muscle aches, headache and dry cough, that can last from a few days to over a week. Although most people survive influenza without incident, the elderly, infants and children, and people with certain chronic medical conditions are most prone to complications. Approximately 36,000 people die as a result of influenza each year in the U.S.

For more information on seasonal flu in Georgia, visit <http://health.state.ga.us/epi/flu/>

