**Media Release Contact: Koko Mackin September 29, 2020 205-220-2713**

**Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama Strongly Encourages Alabamians to Get a Flu Shot From Their Physician or Local Pharmacy**

**BIRMINGHAM, AL** – Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama cares about you and your family’s health. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing the spread of respiratory illnesses, like the flu, this fall and winter is more important than ever. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyone six months and older get a flu vaccination in September or October, but getting vaccinated anytime during the flu season can help protect you. Flu vaccines will not prevent COVID-19, but they will reduce the burden of flu illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths on the healthcare system and conserve limited medical resources for the care of COVID-19 patients.

According to the CDC, viruses circulate at higher levels in the United States during flu season. One person with the flu can infect other people one day before any symptoms develop, and up to about seven days after a person becomes sick. The virus can spread to others up to six feet away, mainly by microscopic droplets expelled into the air when people cough, sneeze or even talk. An annual flu vaccine is the best way to reduce the chances of getting the flu and spreading it to others. When more people get vaccinated, less flu spreads throughout the community.

The CDC also reports all Americans receiving a flu vaccine could dramatically reduce healthcare costs, along with the number of people infected with the flu. Research has found annual direct flu costs, such as hospital stays, medications and doctor visits for adults, are an estimated $8.7 billion. The flu causes U.S. employees to miss approximately 17 million workdays at an estimated $6.2 billion a year in sick days and lost productivity.

Additionally, safe and effective vaccines help prevent two to three million deaths a year.

To prevent the flu:

* Get vaccinated
* Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
* Wash your hands
* Stay home when you’re sick
* Clean and disinfect

To learn more about why vaccines are important and how and where flu shots are available in your area, please visit this CDC resource page for more information: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/freeresources/flu-finder-widget.html>.

***About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama***

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama has insured Alabamians for over 84 years. Blue Cross offers coverage plans to corporations, individuals and the senior market. For more information about Blue Cross, visit [AlabamaBlue.com](http://www.AlabamaBlue.com). Connect with us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/BCBSAL/?fref=ts), check out our videos on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/user/BCBSofAlabama) and follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/BCBSofAlabama) for more up-to-date information.

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