

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**With Influenza and Older Adults,
Ounce of Prevention Worth a Pound of Cure**

EVANSTON, IL (February 14, 2013) -- The influenza virus outbreak is the most severe it has been in 10 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, with providers reporting record numbers of outbreaks in post-acute care, skilled nursing and assisted living communities. And, while the worst of the flu season may be behind us, the CDC cautions that flu season lasts through April, and continued vigilance is the best plan to ensure continued health -- especially for older adults.

“As healthcare providers in senior living or long-term care we must be prepared to meet the needs of residents in the event of an infectious disease outbreak such as this year’s flu epidemic,” said Paula J. Fenza, Staff Educator, Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging.

On average, roughly 24,000 Americans die each flu season, according to the CDC, and more than half of those hospitalized are over age 65. Older adults are not only more susceptible to contracting the flu, but also more likely to die due to complications from the flu.

Providers have reported record number of outbreaks in the post-acute care industry, including skilled nursing and assisted living communities nationwide. Staff at these communities needs to be extremely cautious and alert at this time to avoid the spread of influenza.

Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging offers a program called *PREPARE*, a disaster preparedness webinar series, workshop, and toolkit that teaches senior living staff to manage natural disasters, and other public health emergencies (like the current flu outbreak), and trains participants as

specialists capable of teaching the information to others. Staff working in the seniors housing industry can register online to attend an upcoming *PREPARE* workshop, where they can also earn Continuing Education Units, on February 27th in Evanston, Illinois, or digitally download a toolkit at <http://www.matherlifewaysinstituteonaging.com/health-care-professionals/prepare/>

“For most adults, getting the flu means a few miserable days in bed, but for older people, or people with other medical issues, the flu can be life-threatening, and an influenza outbreak in a nursing home can be serious,” said Victoria L. Braund, MD, FACP, CMD, Medical Director, Mather LifeWays and Director, Division of Geriatrics Department of Medicine NorthShore University HealthSystem. “In fact, the definition of ‘outbreak’ is even more stringent for these facilities, than it might be at a school, or other public place,” said Braund.

Some of the precautions which senior living communities can implement to limit outbreak include:

- Having a plan for alternative staff replace sick staff members
- Implement a plan to restrict visitor access into the building.
- Be prepared to lock down the building entirely if needed
- Take overflow of sub-acute patients from hospitals if needed; and/or keep sick residents in-house while hospitals are full
- Cross train dietary staff to handle other responsibilities if they are short staffed
- Have knowledge of how to limit the spread of the virus ... tips on not spreading the flu, etc.



Based in Evanston, Illinois, Mather LifeWays www.matherlifeways.com is a unique, non-denominational not-for-profit organization founded more than 70 years ago to serve the needs of older adults. Dedicated to developing and implementing Ways to Age WellSM, Mather LifeWays creates programs, places, and residences for today's young-at-heart older adults. Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging is the research and education arm of Mather LifeWays, and serves as a thought leader in the field of aging by designing and conducting national applied research, pilot demonstration projects, and education initiatives.

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