News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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An Early Start to Flu Season Seen in Wyoming

With reports of illness showing flu season is off to an early start in the state, Wyoming's state health officer is encouraging residents to get their annual flu vaccination.

Dr. Wendy Braund, state health officer and Public Health Division senior administrator with the Wyoming Department of Health, said reports of influenza activity in Wyoming have been confirmed, especially in Sheridan County. "While flu season officially runs from October through May, Wyoming's typical peak time is February and March. So we do think this early activity is important to note."

Braund said almost everyone who is six months or older should get an annual flu vaccine because they are a key tool to help prevent influenza. "Whether you choose a flu shot or a nasal spray vaccine, getting immunized is safe and is the single most effective thing most people can do to help prevent getting ill with influenza or passing it on to others."

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. Symptoms include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches.

"Some people are certainly more vulnerable when it comes to flu complications, and that's why influenza causes hospitalizations and even deaths each year," Braund said. "Healthy people get the flu too. "They usually get better in a few days, but can still miss school or work. Unfortunately, they can also infect others who may not be able to recover easily."

Influenza vaccines are available in many locations around Wyoming, including local public health offices, workplaces, doctors' offices and retail stores. "Flu vaccines are not expensive and many insurance policies reimburse patients for the costs," Braund said.

In Wyoming, the cost of the vaccine itself is covered for many children through the Wyoming Vaccinates Important People (WyVIP) program. Children who qualify for free vaccines include those covered by Medicaid, uninsured children, American Indian or Alaska native children and some children considered to be underinsured.

Braund said it's important to realize it takes several days for flu vaccines to protect against the virus. "Every year, unfortunately, we hear from folks who blame the vaccine for giving them the flu. If you're exposed to the flu virus before the vaccine has had the time it needs to protect you, you may still become ill with influenza. But it will not be caused by the vaccine."

Basic common-sense measures can also slow the spread of influenza. "Simple steps such as covering your mouth and nose with your sleeve or a tissue when you sneeze and cough; frequently washing your hands; and staying home from work, school, day care and errands when you are ill can help," Braund said.

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