

# *News From the Wyoming Department of Health*

Thursday, February 9, 2006

## **Influenza Activity Increasing in Wyoming**

CHEYENNE – Wyoming Department of Health officials said today the number of influenza cases has increased considerably across Wyoming in recent weeks.

One hundred and twenty six new cases of confirmed influenza were reported last week, as compared to 41 and 43 cases in the preceding two weeks according to Nicole Lindsey, Wyoming Department of Health surveillance epidemiologist.

“We estimate that flu activity in Wyoming will peak in the next few weeks,” Lindsey said. “So far this season, 309 confirmed cases of influenza have been reported, which is consistent with the 295 cases we had seen by the same time last year.”

Wyoming Department of Health Director, Dr. Brent Sherard, said, “The single best way to protect yourself and others against influenza is to get a flu vaccination each year.” Dr. Sherard suggested the following additional measures to help protect against the flu.

- § Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- § Keep your distance from others if you become sick
- § When possible, stay home from work, school and errands when you are sick, and don't send your children to child care or school if they are sick
- § Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough and be sure to throw the tissue away immediately after use
- § Wash your hands often or use an alcohol based cleaner
- § Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth because these are the easiest locations on the body to spread germs

“If you do become sick, be sure to get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids and avoid using alcohol or tobacco,” Dr. Sherard said. “You can also take medications to relieve your symptoms, but avoid giving aspirin to children or teens with flu-like symptoms.”

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## **Influenza Fact Sheet**

**(Source: Centers for Disease Control)**

### **What is Influenza (commonly called the “flu”)?**

Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. The flu can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death. Although most healthy people recover from the flu without complications, some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious complications from the flu.

### **Be Aware of Common Flu Symptoms**

Influenza usually starts suddenly and may include the following symptoms:

Fever (usually high)	Runny or stuffy nose
Headache	Body aches
Tiredness (can be extreme)	Diarrhea and vomiting (more common among children than adults)
Cough	
Sore throat	

Having these symptoms does not always mean that you have the flu. Many different illnesses, including the common cold, can have similar symptoms.

### **Know the Risks from the Flu**

In some people, the flu can cause serious complications, including bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children and adults may develop sinus problems and ear infections.

### **Know How the Flu Spreads**

The flu usually spreads from person to person in respiratory droplets when people who are infected cough or sneeze. People occasionally may become infected by touching something with influenza virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes. Healthy adults may be able to infect others 1 day before getting symptoms and up to 5 days after getting sick. Therefore, it is possible to give someone the flu before you know you are sick as well as while you are sick.

### **Protection against the Flu**

The single best way to protect yourself and others against influenza is to get a flu vaccination each year. Two kinds of flu vaccine are available in the United States:

- The "flu shot" is an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine is a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV for “live attenuated influenza vaccine”). LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 5 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you can still get vaccinated in December and later. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as springtime. The following additional measures can help protect against the flu.

### **Habits for Good Health**

These steps may help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses such as the flu:

- **Cover your nose and mouth** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze—throw the tissue away after you use it.
- **Wash your hands often with soap and water**, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.** When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- **If you get the flu, stay home from work, school, and social gatherings.** In this way you will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- **Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs often spread this way.

### **What to Do If You Get Sick**

It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from other infections on the basis of symptoms alone. A doctor's exam may be needed to tell whether you have developed the flu or a complication of the flu. There are tests that can determine if you have the flu as long as you are tested within the first 2 or 3 days of illness.

If you develop flu-like symptoms and are concerned about your illness, especially if you are at high risk for complications of the flu, you should consult your health-care provider. Those at high risk for complications include people 65 years or older, people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women, and young children.

### ***Antiviral Medications***

Your doctor may recommend use of an antiviral medication to help treat the flu. Four antiviral drugs (amantadine, rimantadine, zanamavir, and oseltamivir) are approved for treatment of the flu. However, this season, CDC recommends against the use of amantadine or rimantadine for the treatment or prophylaxis of influenza in the United States. These are prescription medications, and a doctor should be consulted before the drugs are used. Antiviral treatment lasts for 5 days and must be started within 2 days of illness. Therefore, if you get flu-like symptoms, seek medical care early.

### ***Other Ways to Respond to the Flu***

If you get the flu, get plenty of rest, drink a lot of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco. Also, you can take medications such as acetaminophen to relieve the fever and muscle aches associated with the flu. Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever.