

## Vaccination remains the best protection against influenza

Written by Staff Reports

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The New Mexico Department of Health is reminding New Mexicans that flu season is around the corner and is urging everyone six months and older to get vaccinated.

“Getting flu vaccine every year is the first and best way to protect yourself and loved ones against getting the flu,” said Department of Health Secretary Lynn Gallagher. “When more people get vaccinated, we reduce the chances that flu spreads in our communities.”

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the influenza viruses which are expected to be most common during the upcoming season. For the 2017-2018 flu season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends use of the flu shot or the recombinant influenza vaccine.

The nasal spray flu vaccine will not be used again during the 2017-2018 flu season in New Mexico.

NMDOH recommends everyone six months of age and older get a flu vaccine each flu season, especially people in the following groups who are at high risk or live with and care for people at high risk for developing serious flu-related complications, such as hospitalization and death:

Children younger than five years old, but especially children younger than two years old.

Pregnant women. (any trimester, and up to two weeks post-partum)

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People age 50 and older.

People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, lung or heart disease, and those who are immunocompromised.

People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including healthcare personnel and caregivers of babies younger than 6 months.

American Indians and Alaskan Natives.

People who are morbidly obese.

People in these groups should also consider seeing their healthcare provider to be evaluated for antiviral medications if they develop flu symptoms. Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness. Flu symptoms may include rapid illness onset with fever, cough, sore throat, headache, and/or muscle aches.

In addition to vaccine, New Mexicans can avoid catching the flu or passing it on to others by washing their hands frequently, covering their mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing, and staying home when ill.

Flu vaccines are offered in many locations, including doctor's offices, hospitals, public health offices, and pharmacies, as well as by many employers and some schools. NMDOH encourages those with health insurance to contact their healthcare provider or pharmacist about getting the flu vaccine.

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The Department offers vaccinations for people without insurance or who are otherwise not able to get vaccinated. Those with Medicaid or other insurance who go to Public Health Offices are asked to bring their insurance card.

To find out about flu vaccination clinics throughout the state or to see where flu vaccine is being offered, call 1-800-280-1618 (option 4) for the Public Health Division Immunization Program.

People should ask their healthcare provider or pharmacist if they need the pneumococcal vaccine which can be given at the same time as flu vaccine. Influenza frequently causes types of pneumonia that can be prevented by the pneumococcal vaccine.

Last flu season in New Mexico, there were 27 influenza-related deaths identified in adults, and 195 pneumonia-related deaths reported.