



There's still time to get the flu vaccine

SANTA FE — With influenza (flu) activity remaining steady across New Mexico since the beginning of the year, the New Mexico Department of Health wants New Mexicans to know that it's not too late to get your flu shot.

Since October, NMDOH has investigated six flu outbreaks in facilities around the state. Children age four and younger have been hospitalized for influenza at a higher rate than at this time last year, or any year since the 2009 pandemic. There have been 19 influenza-related deaths in adults this year with no confirmed pediatric deaths in residents of New Mexico. Flu activity has not yet reached its peak for the 2018-19 season in the state.

"We are roughly only halfway through the influenza season," said NMDOH Cabinet Secretary Kathy Kunkel. "Getting vaccinated against the flu is still the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from getting the flu for the rest of the flu season."

A flu vaccination can keep you from getting sick with flu. Getting vaccinated yourself may also protect people around you, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like babies and young children, older people, and people with certain chronic health conditions.

This season's preliminary vaccine effectiveness is estimated to be 47 percent overall and 61 percent effective among children aged six months to 17 years - higher than last year's vaccine effectiveness of 38 percent.

Influenza activity widespread across New Mexico

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Everyone six months and older who has not yet gotten vaccinated should get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect themselves for the rest of the flu season. Influenza vaccination is strongly recommended for the following high-risk groups:

- Pregnant women (any trimester) and up to two weeks post-partum.
- Children younger than five years, but especially children younger than two years old.
- People aged 65 years and older.
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, and lung or heart disease, and those with immunosuppression from medication or disease.
- 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 six months.
- American Indians and Alaskan Natives.
- People who are morbidly obese.

People in these high-risk groups should also consider seeing their healthcare provider to be evaluated for antiviral medications if they develop flu symptoms. Flu symptoms may include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, and/or muscle aches. Antiviral medications can lessen the severity of the symptoms and potential bad outcomes including hospitalization and even death, and help high-risk patients recover sooner.

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The Department of Health also recommends that you ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if you need the pneumococcal vaccine which can be given at the same time as flu vaccine.

Influenza frequently leads to pneumonia, which can be prevented by the pneumococcal vaccine. The Department offers vaccinations for people without insurance or who are otherwise not able to get vaccinated. Anyone with Medicaid or other insurance who visits the public health offices is asked to bring their insurance card.

For more about flu vaccination clinics go to: <http://nmhealth.orghttp/about/phd/idb/imp/flu/>