

Get your flu shot now

Written by By William Madaras For the Sun
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RMCHCS Chief Medical Officer urges vaccines as flu spreads

The New Mexico Department of Health says that influenza B is now widespread across New Mexico and is anticipating increased activity for weeks to come. As the 2019-2020 flu season grows stronger, the department reports seeing elevated levels of flu in the southeast section of the state, which is unusual for this time of year. The illness is caused mostly by Influenza B/Victoria viruses. After Influenza B, the A (H1N1) viruses are the next most common in metro regions, but they too, are increasing in proportion to other flu viruses.

Flu symptoms may include rapid illness onset with fever, cough, sore throat, headache, and/or muscle aches. New Mexico is one of the top 14 states with residents experiencing flu like symptoms. So far, a 90-year-old in Bernalillo County is the first New Mexican to die in the state from the flu this season. Last year's flu season was harsher than expected, killing 54 people in New Mexico.

All regions of the U.S. are seeing elevated levels of flu-like illnesses, however, peak flu season typically occurs in January or later. The Center for Disease Control estimates that so far this season there have been at least 3.7 million cases of influenza, 32,000 hospitalizations and 1,800 deaths from the flu. More than 80,000 people, including 180 children died from the flu and associated illnesses during the 2017-18 season, the highest number since flu records began being kept almost 42 years ago.

In McKinley County, Chief Medical Officer for Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services Dr. Valory Wangler, suggests residents take precautions and get vaccinated now if they haven't already. She notes that it takes about two weeks for antibodies that protect against the flu to develop.

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“With the height of the flu season approaching, it is important to take preventive measures such as getting vaccinated, covering your cough, and staying home if you have the flu,” Wangler said. “Flu can infect perfectly healthy people, but we also have a responsibility to help protect those in our communities such as the elderly and babies who may be at high risk of serious complications such as hospitalization and death.”

Wangler urges residents to contact their primary care physician to get flu shots. RMCHCS has administered approximately 2,000 doses of flu vaccine this year, primarily at its College Clinic, a multi-specialty outpatient center where flu shots for residents can be obtained.

Protecting Against Multiple Flu Strains

The flu vaccine protects against multiple strains of flu that may circulate at different times and people can get infected with more than one type of flu during the season. Influenza is particularly severe in people with one or more of the following conditions:

- Pregnant women (any trimester) and up to two weeks post-partum.
- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old.
- Adults age 50 and older.
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions like asthma, Diabetes, and lung or heart disease, and those with immuno-suppression 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 of complications from flu, including

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healthcare personnel and caregivers of babies younger than 6 months.

- American Indians and Alaska Natives.
- People who are morbidly obese.

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