

SANTA FE — The New Mexico Department of Health announced the state's first reported influenza-associated pediatric death for the 2023-2024 flu season on Feb. 28. A child (5-12 years old) in Bernalillo County died from complications associated with influenza. To protect the family's privacy, NMDOH will not provide any further information regarding this death.

"We at the New Mexico Department of Health express our condolences to the child's family," Sec. Patrick Allen said. "The flu is common but can cause serious illness and even death. I urge everyone who is eligible to get their flu shot to protect themselves and those around them."

Since the start of the flu season, NMDOH has identified 94 pneumonia and flu-related deaths among adults. Influenza, RSV, COVID-19, and other respiratory illness activity remain elevated in the state and can cause hospitalizations and death throughout the year.

"Vaccination is the best way to prevent severe infection with respiratory viruses, and many New Mexicans are unvaccinated this season," Dr. Miranda Durham, chief medical officer for NMDOH, said. "It's not too late to get vaccinated, and it can be a lifesaver: the more people vaccinated, the lower the chance of serious illness at any age."

The NMDOH recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older receive the flu vaccine each season. The flu season typically runs from October to April. Flu vaccination is especially important for the following groups of people, either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for people at high risk of developing flu-related complications:

- Children ages 6 months to 5 years old.
- Children aged 6 months to 8 years old who have never been vaccinated against influenza, or have an unknown vaccination history, should receive two doses of the influenza vaccine, administered at least four weeks apart.
- Pregnant women (all trimesters), and up to two weeks post-partum.
- People aged 50 years and older.
- People of any age with medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, lung or heart disease,

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and those with weakened immune systems.

- 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.

In addition to vaccination, NMDOH recommends the following measures to help prevent the contraction and transmission of respiratory viruses:

- Wash your hands and your children's hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, particularly after contact with others and before meals.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing, even if you use a tissue.
- Maintain distance from other people and wear a face covering when possible in public.
- Stay home if you have fever and/or respiratory symptoms.
- Consult your doctor about antiviral medicines if you seek medical care for the flu. These medicines are most effective when administered within two days of symptom onset but may still provide assistance even after two days.

Vaccinations offer protection, even if you have already encountered a respiratory infection this season. Consult your healthcare provider regarding vaccines for influenza, COVID-19, and RSV. For information on vaccination clinics across New Mexico, visit HealthMap Vaccine Finder at <https://vaccinefinder.org/> or check the NMDOH website: <http://nmhealth.org/about/phd/idb/imp/flu/>.

