

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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Wyoming's Influenza Activity at High Level

As they see reports of high flu activity across the state, Wyoming Department of Health representatives are encouraging residents to take common-sense steps to avoid becoming ill with influenza or spreading it to others.

According to Clay Van Houten, Wyoming Department of Health emerging diseases unit chief, influenza activity has sharply increased across the state, particularly over the past two weeks. "In Wyoming, the level of flu activity we are seeing right now is higher than at any point since the unusually high level we saw in October 2009 during the H1N1 (swine flu) pandemic," he said. "Unfortunately, there are quite a few ill people out there right now."

Dr. Tracy Murphy, state epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health, said basic common-sense measures can help slow or prevent influenza's spread. "Covering your mouth and nose with your sleeve or a tissue when you sneeze and cough; frequently washing your hands; and staying home from work, school, day care and errands when you are ill can help," Murphy said.

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. Symptoms include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. Influenza can cause severe illness and complications, particularly among older people and the very young.

Murphy said, "If you become ill, be sure to get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids and avoid using alcohol or tobacco. You may also take medications to relieve your symptoms, but avoid giving products containing aspirin to children or teens with flu-like symptoms."

Doctors may recommend prescription antiviral medications to help treat influenza. Prescription antiviral medications may be especially helpful for persons at higher risk for complications from flu such as young children, adults 65 years of age or older, persons with chronic medical conditions, persons with altered immune systems, women who are pregnant or soon after delivery, persons less than 19 years of age who are on long-term aspirin therapy for other conditions, those who are extremely overweight, and residents of nursing homes or other chronic-care facilities. "For antiviral medications to be a good option, it is important to seek medical care quickly," Murphy advised.

Flu vaccines are also available in many locations. "We are still recommending vaccination," Murphy said. "However, it takes up to two weeks for flu vaccines to offer effective protection. If you're exposed to the flu virus during the interim you may still become ill with influenza, but it will not be caused by the vaccine."

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