

# *News from the Wyoming Department of Health*

Thursday, September 26, 2013

## **As Flu Season Approaches, Wyoming Officials Urge Vaccination**

As a handful of flu reports begin to emerge in the state, Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) officials are urging residents to get an annual flu vaccination.

Dr. Wendy Braund, state health officer and WDH Public Health Division senior administrator, said almost everyone who is six months or older should get an annual flu vaccine to help prevent influenza. “Getting immunized is safe and is the single most effective thing most people can do to help prevent getting ill with influenza or passing it on to others.”

Reggie McClinton, a WDH epidemiologist, said the 2012-13 influenza season was considered moderately severe. “Unfortunately, 14 seasonal influenza-associated deaths were reported in Wyoming. This was the highest number of deaths linked to flu reported in the past ten years.”

McClinton noted flu season officially runs from October through May. “Last season we saw our highest levels of activity in mid to late December. Wyoming’s peak times for flu in other years have typically been in February and March.”

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.

Braund emphasized influenza leads to hospitalizations and deaths each year. “Some people are especially vulnerable to flu and its effects, but healthy people get the flu too. While they usually get better in a few days, they often miss school or work. Unfortunately, they can also infect others who may not easily recover.”

Influenza vaccines are available in many locations, including local public health offices, workplaces, doctors’ offices and retail stores. “Flu vaccines are not expensive and many insurance policies reimburse patients for the costs,” Braund said. “This season new vaccine options are available in some locations, including some that offer protection from four strains of flu rather than three.”

In Wyoming, the cost of the vaccine itself is covered for many children by federal funding and the vaccine is distributed by WDH. Children who qualify include those covered by Medicaid, uninsured children, American Indian or Alaska native children and some children considered to be underinsured.

Braund said it’s important to realize it takes about two weeks for flu vaccines to protect against the virus. “Every year, unfortunately, we hear from folks who blame the vaccine for giving them the flu, which simply can’t happen. If you’re exposed to the flu virus before the vaccine has had

the time it needs to start protecting you, you may still become ill with influenza.”

Basic common-sense measures can also slow the spread of influenza such as 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.

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