



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Idaho Public Health Districts

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October 2014

Ready or Not, Flu Season is Here

October may bring in the season of heavier jackets and falling leaves, but it's also the season that jumpstarts sniffles, sneezing... and the FLU. Influenza, better known as flu, spreads every year, but the timing, severity, and length of the season varies from one year to the next.

Even State Epidemiologist, Christine Hahn, M.D. says it's impossible to predict what this year's flu season will be like. "What we do know is that the severity of a flu season has a significant impact on the community. By getting a flu shot, you are protecting not only yourself, but any other people you come in contact with," Hahn explains.

Throughout the year, the health districts stay in close contact with schools, health care providers, and hospitals to have a clear vision of what's happening in our communities related to illness and absenteeism rates. This surveillance activity increases dramatically during flu season. Just last year, thousands of school days were missed by Idaho kids due to flu symptoms. Often times, this requires parents to miss days from work to care for their sick children. In the 2013-2014 flu season, there were 19 flu-deaths in our state. This month, Idaho experienced the first two flu-related deaths of the current flu season.

Local health districts even help facilitate testing to confirm the presence of the flu in our communities by distributing flu test kits to local health care providers. This testing helps public health officials determine if the season's flu vaccine is a good match to the flu strains circulating throughout the state.

HOW CAN YOU BE PREPARED?

The best way people can protect themselves from the flu is to get vaccinated. This year, trivalent and quadrivalent flu vaccines (one targeting three strains of flu and the other targeting four) are available. The quadrivalent vac-

cine gives broader protection against circulating flu viruses. There's also a high dose vaccine for those 65 and older and a nasal spray vaccine available for people ages 2 – 49 years of age. This season, there is an adequate supply of flu vaccine now available. People shouldn't wait to be vaccinated – by getting vaccinated early, you are not only protecting yourself but also those around you.

Some viruses can stay alive for two hours on hard surfaces such as doorknobs and countertops. If you have flu symptoms, stay home to prevent spreading the virus to others. And as always, cover your coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or your sleeve rather than hands, and use hand sanitizer and wash hands frequently.

VACCINES IN HEALTH CARE

Every year, more employers are instructing their employees to get vaccinated. This year, all Kootenai Health (KH) employees are required to get a flu shot. By doing this, employees are missing less days sick at home and are able to take care of their patients. KH's Chief medical Officer, Dr. Walt Fairfax explains, "By being immunized, we reduce the chance of transmitting influenza to our patients and their families while they are in our facility. This reduces the risk of illness for the most vulnerable - the youngest, the oldest, those with compromised immune systems, and new mothers."

STAY UP TO DATE

It is crucial to remind our community members that the flu can be fatal, especially for the elderly and children. Get your flu shot and talk to others about the importance of getting vaccinated and you could be saving a life. You can see the latest flu trends in your area by visiting www.flu.idaho.gov.

HEALTHY PEOPLE IN HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

PANHANDLE HEALTH DISTRICT (1)	PUBLIC HEALTH - IDAHO NORTH CENTRAL DISTRICT (2)	SOUTHWEST DISTRICT HEALTH (3)	CENTRAL DISTRICT HEALTH (4)	SOUTH CENTRAL PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT (5)	SOUTHEASTERN IDAHO PUBLIC HEALTH (6)	EASTERN IDAHO PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT (7)
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