

First Flu of Season Confirmed in Oregon Resident

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Oregon's first confirmed influenza case of the season has been reported to the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division, state officials announced today.

The case of influenza A occurred in a 34-year old Washington County adult male, and was reported by Kaiser Permanente Northwest laboratory, said Mel Kohn, MD, MPH, state epidemiologist in DHS. Kohn added that the man was not hospitalized and is recovering at home.

"This tells us that flu has arrived and we expect to see more cases in the coming weeks," Kohn said. "If you haven't gotten your flu shot yet, now is a good time to do so. Vaccination is far and away the best way to protect yourself from influenza."

Kohn noted that getting immunized also helps protect others in the community because as more people get vaccinated, the spread of disease is reduced. "It not only keeps you from being miserable and housebound for a week with the flu, it keeps you from infecting others," he said.

This week Oregon also joins a national influenza vaccination campaign sponsored by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to encourage widespread influenza vaccination well into the New Year.

Oregon has received most of its supply of vaccine -- more than 1 million doses of injectable vaccine and 17,340 of the nasal spray FluMist -- and flu shot clinics continue to be scheduled. Nationally, the CDC expects record amounts of influenza vaccine, up to 110 million to 115 million doses, to be available by the end of December, Kohn said.

Vaccination is recommended for anyone who wants to avoid being sick from flu, especially those who are at high risk of complications from influenza or are in close contact with those at high risk. Priority groups for vaccination are:

Children aged 6 months to 5 years

Pregnant women

People 50 years of age and older

People of any age with chronic medical conditions

People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities

People who live with or care for people at high risk of complications, such as household contacts, out-of-home caregivers of children 6 months and younger, and

Healthcare workers.

For many people, the nasal spray vaccine FluMist is a good alternative to the injectable vaccine if they are healthy and between the ages of 5 and 49, Kohn said. However, not all insurance plans cover FluMist and in some cases it may be more expensive than the injectable vaccine.

Influenza is characterized by abrupt onset of high fever, headache, sore throat, cough and muscle aches. Unlike other common respiratory illnesses, it is associated with extreme fatigue and loss of appetite lasting several days.

It is estimated that almost 450 Oregonians die of influenza every year; nationally flu kills more than 36,000 people every year.

Information on clinic locations and dates can be obtained by calling 1-800-SAFENET or on the American Lung Association's Flu Clinic Locator Web site.

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