Oregon flu cases on the rise

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Reports of laboratory-confirmed flu cases in Oregon are nearing a peak for the current flu season, and public health officials in the Oregon Department of Human Services want people to know there is still time to get a flu vaccination. The number of lab-confirmed cases rose from 58 two weeks ago to 84 last week. "Flu season is definitely in full swing, with cases spread across Oregon," said Susan Allan, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., DHS Public Health Division administrator. "Fortunately, there is still plenty of vaccine, so anyone who wants to avoid illness should check with their health care provider and see if they can get a flu vaccination." Flu season in Oregon typically peaks in late January or February, and may continue into April or even May. "Influenza is not an illness to take lightly," said Allan. "It can cause serious illness and kills more than 400 Oregonians every year." She said it is especially important that any person in one of the following high-priority groups get vaccinated: â€¢ All children aged 6-59 months; â€¢ Adults aged 50 and older; â€¢ Residents of nursing homes and long term care facilities; â€¢ Anyone aged 5 to 50 years old with underlying medical conditions; â€¢ Pregnant women; â€¢ Health-care workers who provide direct patient care; and â€¢ Caregivers and household contacts of children under 6 months of age. Previous influenza seasons have been characterized by vaccine shortages or shipment delays but this year plenty of vaccine is available. As of Feb. 8, Oregon had received more than 1.2 million doses of vaccine and many providers still have supplies on hand, according to Allan. In addition to injectable flu shots, live attenuated vaccine (LAIV), the nasal spray marketed as FluMist, is a good choice for healthy people ages five and 49 who want to be protected against influenza. This includes health-care workers and those who have contacts with infants, according to Allan. Research has shown it to be at least as safe and effective as the injected vaccine, she said. People seeking vaccinations should check with their health care provider or their county health department. To find a county health department phone number, call 800-SAFENET, or 503-988-5858 in the Portland area.