

Department of Health Reports First Flu Deaths of the Season

Everyone Older than 6 Months Should Get Vaccinated

Santa Fe, NM -- The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) reports the first flu-related deaths of the 2016-2017 season. Three adults have died: two adult men in Rio Arriba and Santa Fe counties, respectively, and an adult woman in Grant County.

"These deaths are a somber reminder that flu can cause serious illness or death, particularly among persons at risk for flu-related complications," said Department of Health Secretary Lynn Gallagher. "As flu season spreads in New Mexico, it is important to get vaccinated if you haven't already. The flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and your family, especially young children and the elderly."

Flu activity is now widespread in New Mexico, but activity may not peak for several more weeks. Flu vaccine is available in communities, and the strains covered by the vaccine are a good match with the strains circulating in New Mexico. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the New Mexico Department of Health recommend that everyone 6 months of age and older get their flu vaccine.

NMDOH suggests contacting healthcare providers or pharmacies to get vaccinated against both flu AND pneumonia. Pneumococcal vaccine can be given at the same time as flu vaccine to patients who qualify. It is an important additional form of protection because influenza frequently causes types of pneumonia that can be prevented by the pneumococcal vaccine. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about whether you need this vaccine as well.

While everyone should get a flu vaccine each flu season, it's especially important that people in the following groups get vaccinated, either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for people at high risk for developing flu-related complications:

- [Pregnant women](#) (any trimester) and up to two weeks post-partum
- [Children younger than 5](#) years of age, but especially children younger than 2 years of age
- [People aged 65 and older](#)
- People of any age with certain [chronic medical conditions](#) like asthma, diabetes, and lung or heart disease and those with immunosuppression from medication or disease
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including healthcare personnel and caregivers of babies younger than 6 months
- American Indians and Alaskan Natives
- People who are morbidly obese

The Department also recommends the following to help prevent catching or spreading flu:

- Wash your hands and your children's hands frequently, especially after contact with other people.
- Use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze and dispose of the tissue afterward, or cough or sneeze into your sleeve if no tissues are available.
- Clean your hands after you cough or sneeze, even if you use a tissue. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner if soap and water are not available and your hands are not visibly soiled.
- Stay home if you get the flu.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

Symptoms of seasonal flu may include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headache, tiredness and/or muscle aches. *People who might have flu – particularly if they are in the groups listed above at risk for severe disease and complications – should seek medical care and start antiviral medication as soon as possible.*

Antiviral medications for treatment of flu (oseltamivir and zanamivir) are available and can shorten the duration of illness and prevent complications, hospitalization and death. The CDC recommends the use of antivirals as early as possible in any patient with confirmed or suspected flu who is hospitalized or who has severe, complicated or progressive illness. Antivirals are recommended for anyone with influenza symptoms at high risk of complications regardless of flu test results.

For more information about flu, visit the Department of Health's flu page at www.nmhealth.org and click on the flu banner.