

Department of Health Reports Flu Activity Now Peaked in New Mexico
Flu shot and good health hygiene still recommended to keep it that way

SANTA FE —The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) reports that although flu activity remains widespread across the state, it appears activity overall in New Mexico has peaked and will likely continue to gradually decrease for the remainder of the season which is expected to be several more weeks.

As of February 16, 2018, NMDOH reports 28 season-to-date flu outbreaks in long-term care facilities (LTCFs), thirty-four flu-related deaths, all in adults, and 100 pneumonia-related deaths.

It is common during any flu season to have a peak of influenza A cases – typically the more severe flu - and then a later, smaller peak of influenza B cases, which is generally milder. This year the influenza A and influenza B activity peaks were relatively close together leading to the surge in activity that we have seen over the last couple of weeks.

With that in mind, NMDOH reminds all New Mexicans that it is not too late to get vaccinated and that *everyone* should continue good hand-washing habits as well as cough and sneezing etiquette, and staying home from work/school, if possible, while you're sick - especially if you have a fever.

With recently released mid-season vaccine effectiveness numbers by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NMDOH stresses the importance of vaccination as we continue to see increases in influenza activity, which is covered in this season's. Interim findings show effectiveness for this year's flu vaccine was 36%, which was on the lower end of the typical range of flu vaccine effectiveness of 40-60%.

Vaccination, however, is very important and is the best way to protect yourself and those that you care about. It is recommended everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine, as it can still protect you from illness and/or reduce the severity of illness if you should develop the flu.

The Department of Health recommends New Mexicans talk with their healthcare provider or pharmacist about getting the flu vaccine. Flu vaccine protects against

multiple strains of flu that may be co-circulating at any given time, and people can get infected with more than one type of flu during the season.

Flu activity is monitored with a variety of surveillance systems in New Mexico, including a network of 45 outpatient providers throughout the state that report influenza-like illnesses (fever with cough or sore throat) from October through May. Providers participating in this surveillance network reported that for the week ending February 10, 2018, 8.5% of their patient visits were for influenza-like illness. Since January, flu-related hospitalizations have climbed more than threefold, with those older than 65 years and young children 0-4 years of age having the highest risk.

As always, getting the flu shot is highly recommended for the following high-risk groups:

- [Pregnant women](#) (any trimester) and up to two weeks post-partum
- [Children younger than 5](#), but especially children younger than 2 years old
- [People age 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

People in high risk groups listed above and those who live with or care for high risk individuals are especially encouraged to get vaccinated against the flu. For people at high risk of severe complications who become sick with influenza-like illness, it is recommended they talk to their healthcare provider about being evaluated for antiviral medications. Antivirals, if started early, can sometimes help reduce the severity and duration of disease.

To find out more about flu vaccination clinics throughout New Mexico, you can go to HealthMap Vaccine Finder at <https://vaccinefinder.org/> or go to the NMDOH website: <http://nmhealth.org/about/phd/idb/imp/flu/>.

