

Minnesotans urged to get vaccinated during National Influenza Vaccination Week

Written by

Monday, 09 December 2013 14:07

The month of December is filled with holiday events, shopping, and spending time with family and friends. Don't let influenza keep you from enjoying the upcoming season. Influenza season is just getting underway in Minnesota, so it's not too late to get vaccinated against what can be a serious disease, say state health officials. Nearly everyone should get vaccinated against influenza.

An ideal time to get vaccinated is during National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW), which runs Dec. 8-14, 2013. The Minnesota Department of Health is participating in this national campaign by partnering with local public health agencies and other health care providers to provide Minnesotans with opportunities to get their annual influenza vaccination.

Local public health agencies, nonprofit groups and health care organizations in many Minnesota communities will sponsor influenza vaccination clinics during NIVW as well as throughout the month of December and beyond. Flu vaccinations are now given at a wide variety of places, including traditional doctors' offices, local health department clinics, and community settings as well as in retail pharmacy and worksite locations. With many forms of the influenza vaccine now available, check with your provider to decide which is the best option for you.

"With so many opportunities and options for vaccination, it's easier than ever to get vaccinated," said Kris Ehresmann, director of MDH's Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control division.

Influenza vaccination is recommended for everyone six months and older unless they cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons. It is especially important that those at high risk for serious complications from influenza be vaccinated. These include pregnant women, seniors, young children and those with chronic medical conditions.

Children under six months of age cannot receive influenza vaccine, so household contacts and caretakers should be vaccinated to protect the very young.

"By getting vaccinated for influenza now, you can greatly reduce your chances of getting influenza - or spreading it to someone else - during the busy holiday season," Ehresmann noted.

Influenza is a disease that can have serious consequences. Last season, more than 3,000 people in Minnesota were hospitalized with influenza. "The best way to reduce your risk of serious illness is with vaccination," Ehresmann said. "While the vaccine doesn't offer perfect protection, if you don't get vaccinated, you have zero protection." The vaccine effectively prevents about half of influenza cases in healthy adults and even more in children. Unfortunately, protection may be less in those with weakened immune systems, including the elderly, making it even more important for their contacts to be vaccinated.

It's important to get the influenza vaccine every year, health officials said, because the level of protection wanes over the course of the year. Also, the vaccine often changes from year to year because the strains of virus circulating around the world can change.

Minnesotans urged to get vaccinated during National Influenza Vaccination Week

Written by

Monday, 09 December 2013 14:07

Minnesota is currently experiencing sporadic flu activity. Flu season can peak anytime between January and April, so getting an influenza vaccination now can provide months of protection, said Ehresmann.

To locate the flu clinic nearest you, go to the MDH Influenza website at www.mdhflu.com and select

Vaccine Clinic Look-Up

.

The cost of vaccinations will vary at each site. There is no cost to people with Medicare Part B and some other insurance plans, provided they bring their Medicare or other insurance cards with them. Those seeking shots are asked to wear short sleeves, perhaps under a sweater if it's cold, to make getting the shot easier and more comfortable.

Influenza vaccinations also may be given at other locations and times not listed on the MDH website. Check with your physician's office or regular walk-in clinic about getting vaccinated against the flu.

During flu season, besides getting vaccinated, there are other steps people can take to avoid spreading or catching influenza:

- Do your best to stay healthy. Get plenty of rest, physical activity and healthy eating.
- Stay home from school or work if you have a respiratory infection. Avoid exposing yourself to others who are sick with flu-like illness.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue whenever you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue away. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Clean surfaces you touch frequently, such as doorknobs, water faucets, refrigerator handles and telephones.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.

The symptoms of influenza, which tend to come on suddenly, can include a sore throat, coughing, fever, headache, muscle aches and fatigue. People who become severely ill with influenza-like symptoms should see a physician. Influenza is caused by a virus and antibiotics are not effective against it.

-MDH-