

Flu Vaccine Arrives With Start of Flu Season

With the start of fall comes the start of the flu season and the arrival of flu vaccine at the Panhandle Health District (PHD).

Health experts recommend flu vaccinations for everyone six months old and up. The flu virus is contagious and spreads quickly, particularly in group settings such as school and workplaces. The vaccine is the best protection from the flu.

PHD's Hayden office, 8500 N. Atlas Rd., has flu vaccine for all ages and has scheduled clinics to provide it to the public. No appointments are necessary. Vaccinations are \$29 for adults and \$10 for children. PHD accepts cash, checks, credit cards, Medicaid and Medicare Part B. People should bring insurance cards and any supplemental insurance information.

Flu vaccination clinics are the following dates:

- Oct. 7, 1:30-4:00 p.m., for all ages at PHD Hayden
- Oct. 11, 2:00-5:00 p.m., for all ages at Yoke's Foods pharmacy in Kellogg.
- Oct. 14, 1:30-4:00 p.m., for all ages at PHD Hayden
- Oct. 18, 9:30 to noon, for all ages at Hayden Super One Foods, 240 W. Hayden Ave.
- Oct. 20, 10 a.m. to noon, for all ages at the Post Falls Senior Center, 1215 E. 3rd Ave.
- Oct. 28, 1:30-4:00 p.m., for all ages at PHD Hayden.

This year's flu vaccine targets three types of flu viruses, including H1N1. People vaccinated last year against the flu need a new vaccination this year. Children 6 months old to 8 years old need two doses of the vaccine unless they received at least one dose of the flu vaccine last year. If that's the case, they need one dose of this year's vaccine. The dosage recommendation may change next year if the vaccine changes.

A high-dose vaccine is available this year for people older than 64. The high-dose vaccine contains four times the antigen in the regular flu shots. Immune response weakens with age. The higher dose is intended to create a stronger immune response. The high-dose vaccine costs \$50 and is covered by Medicare Part B.

Flu viruses can infect anyone, but they typically cause more complications for seniors, young children, pregnant women and people with chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease.

They're also unpredictable. The United States averages 36,000 deaths per year from the seasonal flu, but flu deaths have ranged from 3,000 one year to 49,000 another. The number of flu cases any year is hard to know because flu isn't a reportable disease.

Panhandle Health District talks to schools, doctors and clinics throughout the season to get a sense of how widespread flu may be in the five northern counties. Flu symptoms vary in intensity, though, and many people never seek medical treatment.

Flu is a respiratory illness. Symptoms include fever, dry cough, sore throat, body aches, malaise and chills. People with symptoms should stay home to recover and to prevent spreading the virus to others.

The flu is contagious before symptoms start, so practicing good hygiene at all times can help prevent its spread. PHD recommends people:

- Get a flu vaccination.
- Wash hands often and particularly after sneezing and coughing.
- Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.
- Cover their coughs and sneezes or cough into their sleeve.

- Stay home when sick.

For more information on the seasonal flu, visit the PHD website at www.phd1.idaho.gov.