

Health officials: Lots of flu vaccine on hand

http://www.standard.net/stories/2011/09/25/health-officials-lots-flu-vaccine-hand%23.TotBM_JKBy4.printfriendly

October 4, 2011

OGDEN -- It's impossible to predict how influenza is going to behave, but public health officials are hoping this year's vaccine availability will produce a mild year for the contagion.

At least 170 million doses of the flu vaccine will be available this year, according to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This year, for the first time since the vaccine was developed, there will be four options: the regular flu shot, intranasal FluMist, Fluzone Intradermal and Fluzone High-Dose.

"There is plenty of vaccine with no delay in shipments," said Michelle Singleton, immunization program manager at Weber-Morgan Health Department.

"People have been able to come at their convenience without any long lines. There has been just a calm, pleasant atmosphere for both the patients and the staff."

Singleton said the number of flu shots given at the health department is up about 10 percent so far compared with last year. However, most people typically wait until October to get their flu shot.

"We really start promoting the vaccine in October," said Lewis Garrett, Davis County Health Department director.

"We have it right now, but we really don't expect to see the majority of people come in until October. We have probably given fewer shots compared to last year so far."

The CDC estimates around 124 million people were vaccinated against influenza last year, up 8 million from the year before.

Although this year's formula is the same as last year's, immunity has worn off, so it's important to get the vaccine again, officials say.

"If you got the vaccine last year and think you're still protected, you're not. That's a fallacy," Garrett said. "The vaccine wears off pretty quickly, so you still need to get it again this year."

The available vaccines include the typical shot, administered into the upper arm or thigh for everyone older than 6 months. FluMist, a nasal vaccine, is available for healthy people ages 2 to 50. Fluzone uses a tiny needle called "ouchless" by some and is limited to 18- to 64-year-olds.

Fluzone High-Dose contains about three times the regular dose of flu antigen and is reserved for people ages 65 and older.

The vaccine is available at local health departments, as well as pharmacies and health clinics, Garrett said.

With no shortage in the supply this year, there should be no excuse not to be immunized. Not only is the vaccine widely available, it's relatively inexpensive, and some insurance providers even cover the cost.

"Influenza is not an insignificant disease," Garrett said. "Most people who get it recover, but it knocks you down for a week to 10 days and leaves you feeling very miserable. Some people have very serious complications."

Singleton agrees and said people are hospitalized and even die from the disease each year.

"To date, vaccination is the best defense against influenza," she said.

"Good health habits help. Handwashing is very important. If you are sick, stay home. Cough into your sleeve to avoid exposing others.

"You can make a difference in the amount of influenza disease in your community."