

State of Montana *Health Alert Network*

DPHHS HAN ADVISORY

DATE: November 24, 2010



SUBJECT: Montana's First Confirmed Influenza Cases

INSTRUCTIONS:

FORWARD to local HAN contacts at your discretion

INFORMATION / RECOMMENDATIONS:

Please see attached press release

DPHHS Subject Matter Resource:

For more information regarding this HAN,
contact: Epidemiology Program 444-0273

DPHHS Health Alert Hotline:

1-800-701-5769

DPHHS HAN Website:

www.han.mt.gov

Categories of Health Alert Messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Please send contact information updates to hhshan@mt.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 24, 2010

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Influenza cases confirmed in two Montana counties

Influenza has been confirmed in a Gallatin County resident and Wheatland County resident, the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) announced today.

These cases are an important indication that influenza is now circulating in Montana.

DPHHS Director Anna Whiting Sorrell said now is the time to get vaccinated for influenza. "Holidays are no time to be sick," Director Whiting Sorrell said. "It's a good idea to get vaccinated before things get busy with travel, family gatherings and holiday events. Getting a flu vaccine now will protect you throughout the season and keep the flu from spoiling holiday plans with loved ones."

The 2010-11 influenza vaccine this year protects against three different influenza strains, including the 2009 H1N1 A strain. The other two influenza strains included are the seasonal influenza H3N2 A strain and influenza B strain. So there is no longer a separate H1N1 vaccine, as it is now part of the seasonal flu vaccine.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now recommends that everyone six months of age and older get vaccinated against influenza. Many physicians' offices, clinics, pharmacies and local and tribal health departments have plentiful supplies of vaccine, Whiting Sorrell said.

People most at risk for complications are the elderly, women who are pregnant and individuals that have chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or other conditions that reduce immunity to influenza. Other people that are at higher risk of infection or are likely to spread influenza viruses to vulnerable populations are health care workers and caregivers.

Children, too, are considered to be at higher risk in Montana. In 2008-2009, Montana's children were less likely than their national counterparts to have been vaccinated for influenza. A national survey estimated that only 34% of the state's children aged 6-23 months were vaccinated compared to the U.S. average of 42%. Children under two years of age are at high-risk for complications and many end up hospitalized if infected by influenza.

“Because influenza can cause substantial increases in death and hospitalizations, public health agencies are making every effort to vaccinate Montana’s young children as well as other groups at high risk for infection and severe complications,” says DPHHS State Medical Officer Dr. Steven Helgerson.

In addition to getting vaccinated, health officials strongly recommend that people take very important, common sense steps to prevent infection. Those steps include covering coughs and sneezes, frequent hand washing, and staying home when sick to prevent infecting others.

“The best line of defense is to get vaccinated against influenza,” Director Whiting Sorrell said. “This step will keep you healthy and help prevent the spread of this virus.”

For more information on ways to protect yourself and others from becoming a victim of influenza contact your local health department or visit the DPHHS website at <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov>. In addition, visit www.flu.gov and www.cdc.gov/flu for updates throughout the influenza flu season.