

Cover Sheet

DATE: September 17, 2015

SUBJECT: Influenza Season has arrived: Get your vaccinations

INSTRUCTIONS:

DISTRIBUTE to your local HAN contacts. This HAN is intended for general sharing of information.

- Time for Forwarding: **As Soon As Possible**
- Please forward to DPHHS at hhshan@mt.gov
- **Remove this cover sheet before redistributing and replace it with your own**

For LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT reference only

DPHHS Subject Matter Resource for more information regarding this HAN, contact:

**DPHHS CDCP
Epidemiology Section
1-406-444-0273**

**DPHHS Health Alert Hotline:
1-800-701-5769**

**DPHHS HAN Website:
www.han.mt.gov**

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Please ensure that DPHHS is included on your HAN distribution list.

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.

Information Service: passes along low level priority messages that do not fit other HAN categories and are for informational purposes only.

Please update your HAN contact information on the [Montana Public Health Directory](#)

Information Sheet

Date: September 17, 2015

Subject: Influenza Season has arrived: Get your vaccinations

Background:

Montana has confirmed 12 influenza cases in six counties since August 1, 2015. Two appear to be locally acquired (no travel histories) influenza B cases with the remainder being Influenza A cases linked to travel acquired cases. Travel acquired cases are generally not considered to be counted as our first seasonal cases.

Information:

Recent influenza A cases can be traced to travel related index cases but with secondary transmission noted in a health care setting. While this reflects an early arrival of influenza cases, we can't really predict the impact on this year's influenza cases at this time. However, we are encouraging testing of suspected cases and promotion of vaccination efforts.

Recommendations:

Providers:

Please review the information and press release. These early cases could be an aberration or they could be indicative of an early season. Please be alert for influenza like illness and consider testing for influenza even though early in the season.

We are requesting laboratories to submit specimens on anyone tested locally- regardless of local test result. The Montana Public Health Laboratory is interested in this enhanced surveillance and will support it during the next couple of weeks. **This is a temporary request** and you will be informed of when to stop. If you have questions, please contact MTPHL at 1-800-821-7284. More complete seasonal information for laboratory testing will follow within the next week.

Local Health Jurisdictions:

Please work with your providers to coordinate testing and reporting. Additional guidance regarding influenza reporting to the state health department will be sent over the next few working days.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 17, 2015

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Influenza Season has arrived: Get your vaccinations

State and local public health officials are seeing an early start to the influenza season.

While the season usually doesn't begin until October, Montana has had early influenza reports from six counties: Yellowstone, Gallatin, Lewis and Clark, Missoula, Beaverhead and Broadwater Counties.

Most of the early cases can be traced to travelers who have returned to Montana with the illness but some local transmission is now occurring. With local transmission occurring, it is important to get vaccinated against influenza now.

Influenza can be serious. Last season, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) recorded 608 hospitalizations and 24 deaths related to influenza.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent influenza from affecting you and your family. State, tribal and local public health authorities indicate vaccine is widely available and recommend taking advantage of the vaccine before additional cases increase your risk. Influenza vaccination is very safe and is recommended for everyone older than six months.

The composition of the flu vaccine is reviewed each year and updated to protect against the flu viruses that research indicates will be the most common during the upcoming season. Flu vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, doctor visits, missed work or school as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations and deaths.

Individuals seeking vaccine have many options beyond the typical shot including a high dose flu shot approved for people 65 and older, a “short needle” intradermal flu shot approved for people 18 through 64 years of age, and nasal-spray vaccine. Depending on brand, these vaccines protect against three or four influenza strains. Public health officials recommend Montanans consult with their healthcare provider regarding the best option.

“It’s time to get a jump on influenza,” said DPHHS Director Richard Opper. “People should get vaccinated every year, as the circulating viruses and vaccines change. This year’s vaccine has been updated to address what is expected to circulate and we urge you to get immunized now.

With the options available, getting vaccinated is easier than ever. Getting the flu vaccine will help you stay healthy this winter.”

Protection provided by vaccination lasts throughout the entire flu season, even when vaccine is given in early fall. A new dose is needed every year to keep up active defense against changing viruses.

“Individuals with asthma, diabetes, other chronic medical conditions, the elderly, pregnant women and young children can become very ill if infected by influenza,” said Bekki Wehner, DPHHS Immunization Program Manager. “In addition to protecting yourself, getting vaccinated can protect others around you who may be at high-risk of complications.” Officials add that it is very important for health care providers and other caregivers to get vaccinated in order to protect the vulnerable populations they work with.

Remember, it takes two weeks before the vaccine can stop flu in your body. People wanting to get immunized, or have their children vaccinated, should consult their health care provider. Vaccinations are available at doctor offices, county or tribal health departments, and many pharmacies.

While, vaccination is the first line of defense against influenza however other preventive measures can help stop the spread of germs, in general. Remember to wash your hands often with soap and water, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and limit contact with others when you are sick.

More information can be found at the DPHHS web site: www.dphhs.mt.gov