

Health Department Warns: Flu Activity On the Rise

Local News

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GRAYS HARBOR COUNTY, Wash. - Local health care providers, schools, and emergency rooms are reporting a sharp increase in the number of people they're seeing with symptoms of the flu. Local health officials say it looks like the flu is here.

"We've been watching for and expecting this," says Dr. John Bausher, the county's health officer. "Like communities all over the state, we're seeing a more rapid spread of the flu as the colder weather sets in."

"We know people are anxious for vaccine, and so are we," says Bausher. "But we really want people to remember to do the simple things that can so powerful in preventing the spread of the flu. Wash your hands often, cover your cough, and if you're sick stay home."

Anyone with a fever over 100 degrees should not go to work or school until they have been free of fever for at least 24 hours. And since most people with the flu get well in 4-7 days without treatment, health officials are encouraging people with the flu to take care of themselves at home. "We want to make sure people who are at high risk of severe disease are able to get care promptly," says Bausher. "That becomes impossible if everyone with the flu tries to see a health care provider."

Most people can expect to recover at home in 4 to 7 days by getting plenty of rest, drinking lots of clear fluids, using acetaminophen or ibuprofen for comfort and fever, and watching for signs of complications. Although you may feel awful, health care probably won't help.

But certain people are encouraged to contact their health care provider at the first sign of the flu: people who are younger than 4 years or older than 65, pregnant women, and people of any age with chronic heart, lung, immune, neuromuscular, or metabolic conditions (including diabetes). These people are more likely to become severely ill with the flu and might benefit from early treatment with antiviral medications.

Also, anyone with the flu who has these symptoms should talk to a health care provider right away: shortness of breath, constant belly or chest pain, severe or persistent vomiting, seizures, confusion, signs of dehydration, or symptoms that improve and then get worse again.

Although most cases of the flu aren't tested, it's likely that H1N1 (swine) flu virus is the primary cause of the local illnesses. "It's the main strain that's circulating all over the globe," Bausher said. The illness caused by the H1N1 virus is identical to the flu that circulates every year in most cases.

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