

Flu vaccine Available to Washington Residents Earlier Than Ever Before

Local News

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Flu vaccine arrived in our state earlier this year than ever before and more is expected to be available this season than in the past. This year the vaccine is recommended for everyone age 6 months and older. It protects against three strains of flu – including the H1N1 virus that caused so much illness last season, especially among children and young adults. Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself, your family, and your community from the flu. Flu is a serious disease. It causes thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations in our country each year. Everyone can do their part by getting vaccinated. “The most important step to prevent the spread of flu is to get vaccinated each season,” says Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “Even healthy kids and adults can get very sick. They can spread it to their family, friends and people in the community.”

Flu can make anyone sick, especially people who are at greater risk for serious flu-related complications. This includes older people, infants and young children, pregnant women, and people with chronic diseases like asthma and diabetes, heart disease, neurologic conditions, and other long-term health conditions. The Department of Health provides flu vaccine for all kids under 19. The agency ordered about 480,000 doses of flu vaccine for this season. The supply includes shots and nasal spray. The state-supplied vaccine is given to patients at no cost; however, health care providers may charge an office visit or administration fee. Adults should talk to their insurance carriers to check on coverage for flu vaccine. Secretary Selecky has temporarily suspended Washington’s limit on the amount of mercury (thimerosal) allowed in flu vaccine given to certain people who are sensitive to latex. Much of the thimerosal-free flu vaccine produced this year may contain trace amounts of latex. By suspending the limits, pregnant women and kids under three who are or may be allergic to latex will have access to the vaccine that will protect them from flu. Thimerosal is a preservative used in vaccines. It’s been used safely for years to prevent contamination of vaccines in vials that contain more than one dose. The Food and Drug Administration licenses flu vaccine and places no limits on thimerosal for use in people. Contact your health care provider for immunizations. To find an immunization clinic, contact your [local health agency](http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm), call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588, or check the American Lung Association’s online [flu shot locator](http://www.lungusa.org/lung-disease/influenza/flu-clinic-locator/) (<http://www.lungusa.org/lung-disease/influenza/flu-clinic-locator/>). The Department of Health [Flu News website](http://www.doh.wa.gov/FluNews/default.htm) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/FluNews/default.htm>) has information about flu vaccine safety, recommendations, and good health habits.