

Flu Numbers Continues to Rise in Many Areas of Washington

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : January 18, 2013 at 5:30 am

OLYMPIA, Wash. - Flu season is in full swing in Washington and flu activity is now classified as widespread, which means people are catching and spreading the flu in most areas of the state. "Flu is a serious illness that can be fatal, and several Washington residents have died from influenza this season," said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. "Taking simple steps to prevent the flu can help people avoid this miserable and potentially dangerous illness. We urge people who haven't been vaccinated to do it now." People die from flu every season in Washington and around the nation. Even healthy people can get very sick with the flu. Everyone six months of age and older is recommended to get a flu vaccine. Vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk, including people 65 years and older, people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), pregnant women, young children, American Indians, and Alaska Natives. Flu outbreaks in several long-term care facilities around the state are a particular concern. Many people who live or receive medical care in long-term care facilities and health care centers are at high risk for influenza.

State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes sent a letter to facility managers urging them to encourage employees to get vaccinated to protect clients, patients, and themselves from the flu. Visitors to these facilities should get the flu vaccine and delay visits if they're sick. Vaccine for adults is available in most Washington communities, though some providers may run out. Flu often comes on quickly with symptoms that may include fever and chills, cough, sore throat, muscle and body aches, and extreme tiredness. Most people who get the flu will recover in less than two weeks, but some will develop complications (such as pneumonia) as a result of the flu. For some people, these complications can result in hospitalization or death. The Department of Health urges people at risk for flu complications to contact their health care provider promptly if they develop flu symptoms. Antiviral medication — when taken within the first 48 hours of illness — can reduce the likelihood of severe illness.