



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Idaho Public Health Districts

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October 2015

Ushering in a New Flu Season

Another flu season is here. Will it be worse than last year? Will the shot be more effective this go-round? While some will try to predict what is ahead this season, doing so with any certainty is far from simple. However, one thing is certain: The flu shot is your best defense against the virus, and anyone six months of age and older should receive the vaccine each year.

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and can be deadly.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), last fall and winter marked a bad year for flu. Ultimately, last year's vaccine was estimated to be 19 percent effective against the circulating strains.¹ However, even in seasons where the vaccine proves less effective among most populations, getting the flu shot can still be beneficial. According to the CDC, antibodies made in response to vaccination with one flu virus can sometimes provide protection against different but related viruses.

Additionally, it's important to remember that the vaccine contains three or four flu viruses (depending on the type of vaccine you receive) so that even when there is a less than ideal match or lower effectiveness against one virus, the vaccine may protect against the other viruses.

Get Vaccinated Sooner than Later

Flu outbreaks can happen as early as October and can last as late as May, and in the United States, typically peak between December and February. Last year, Idaho saw its seasonal flu cases peak between late December and mid-January, with 32 deaths last season thought to be flu-associated.

Flu vaccines are designed to protect against the main flu viruses that research suggests will be the most common during the upcoming season. Three kinds of flu viruses commonly circulate among people today: influenza A (H1N1) viruses, influenza A (H3N2) viruses, and influenza B viruses. The H3N2 and the influenza B components were updated for this season's vaccine.

Based on your age and any specific health conditions, you may have the option between a *trivalent* vaccine, which protects against three strains, or a *quadrivalent* vaccine, which protects against four strains. There is no preferred recommendation—the most important thing is to get a flu vaccine.

Fortunately, getting vaccinated has never been easier. Many of Idaho's public health departments, pharmacies, and health care providers offer the vaccine on a walk-in basis – and a variety of methods are available, some needle-free. However, the flu shot takes two weeks to become effective, so getting it sooner than later is advised. The good news is that it's never too late to get



vaccinated while flu viruses are circulating in the community. In addition to getting your shot, the age-old advice of regularly washing your hands with soap and water, covering your coughs and sneezes, and staying home if you feel sick, can go a long way to prevent the flu and other bugs that are sure to make the rounds this winter season.

For more information on getting your flu vaccine and which one is right for you, talk to your health care provider or local health department.

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HEALTHY PEOPLE IN HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

PANHANDLE HEALTH DISTRICT (1)	PUBLIC HEALTH - IDAHO NORTH CENTRAL DISTRICT (2)	SOUTHWEST DISTRICT HEALTH (3)	CENTRAL DISTRICT HEALTH (4)	SOUTH CENTRAL PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT (5)	SOUTHEASTERN IDAHO PUBLIC HEALTH (6)	EASTERN IDAHO PUBLIC HEALTH (7)
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¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/news/updated-vaccine-effectiveness-2014-15.htm>