VERMONT | **Department of Health**
Agency of Human Services

Flu Season Slow to Arrive, but Certainly on the Way

National Influenza Vaccination Week, December 8-14, 2013

VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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BURLINGTON – While influenza has not yet officially arrived in Vermont, it's certainly coming soon – if it's not already here. A few cases of the flu have been reported in surrounding states and in Quebec.

To get ready for flu season, everyone age 6 months and older should get vaccinated against the flu. This will benefit both the vaccinated individual and people in their family and community who are at high risk of developing serious flu-related complications.

"It's not too late to vaccinate," said Patsy Kelso, state epidemiologist for infectious disease. "It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to be protective so, if you haven't already, now is a good time to get vaccinated before more of the holiday gatherings."

National Influenza Vaccination Week is December 8-14 and highlights the importance of continuing flu vaccination through the holiday season and beyond.

Those most at risk for serious illness, hospitalization and even death are pregnant women, young children – especially infants too young to be vaccinated – people age 65 and older, and anyone with certain chronic medical conditions, including asthma, diabetes, heart disease, neurological conditions, blood, kidney and liver disorders, HIV or AIDS, cancer, and obesity.

Get the Flu Vaccine Every Year

There is no way to avoid germs throughout the flu season, but you can lower your risk of infection by getting the flu vaccine every year. Most vaccines protect against three strains of the flu virus – two A and one B strain. The A strains are responsible for a majority of flu illness, including most of the severe flu cases. This year, some flu vaccine will protect against four strains of flu viruses – two A and two B strains.

All flu vaccine that comes in the form of a nasal spray contains protection against four strains of the flu virus. Most children and adults (except pregnant women), ages 2 through 49, can get the nasal spray.

"We don't recommend one type of flu vaccine over any other," said Kelso. "The bottom line is any flu vaccine can cut your risk of illness by up to 60 percent."

Vaccine supply is adequate this year, and is offered in doctors' offices, clinics, retail stores, pharmacies, health centers and by employers. The flu season, which typically peaks in January or February, is quite variable from year to year so it is important to be vaccinated now.

Take simple every day actions to help keep illness from spreading:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve every time you sneeze or cough.
- Wash your hands often and well with soap and water. Use a hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Keep hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay home from work, school or public places when you're sick.

If you get a cold or the flu, antibiotics won't help.

Flu symptoms typically include fever, headache, tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and body aches. If you get a cold or the flu, antibiotics won't help. Taking them for a virus won't make you feel better or get you back to school or work faster. Antiviral medications can lessen the symptoms and shorten the duration of the flu. Early treatment with antivirals is recommended for people at risk for serious illness from the flu. If you're in a high risk group and have flu symptoms, contact your healthcare provider.

For more information about flu vaccination, prevention, and treatment and for downloadable posters, fact sheets, videos and other resources and multiple languages, visit the Health Department's website at **healthvermont.gov.**

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