PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

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Influenza has reached Kitsap County
It is not too late to get a flu shot

KITSAP COUNTY, WA— Flu season has reached Kitsap County.

While influenza (flu) activity in Kitsap County was low this fall, there have now been a number of lab-confirmed influenza cases in Kitsap County. A local assisted-living facility has also recently reported an outbreak of influenza among residents, and there has been one influenza-related death in Kitsap County in an elderly individual.

Data released in this week's Kitsap Public Health District weekly Respiratory Illness Report also shows an increase in Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) activity, as often occurs during influenza season. Based on data trends from previous flu seasons, the District expects to see continuing increases in influenza activity in the coming weeks.

 "It is not too late to get vaccinated against the flu," said Dr. Susan Turner, Health Officer for the Kitsap Public Health District. "The increase and severity of flu illness among seniors in our community is an important reminder that the flu shot is a key tool to protect ourselves and those we love, especially for people at higher risk for flu-related complications—like pregnant women and seniors."

People at high risk who get the flu may develop serious complications and the flu can make existing health conditions worse. This can lead to hospitalization and death. People at risk for developing complications from the flu include adults aged 65 and older, pregnant women, children under 5 years (especially those under 2 years), people living in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities, and those with certain medical conditions (such as asthma, chronic lung disease, heart disease, weakened immune systems due to medications or disease, diabetes). American Indians and Alaska Natives seem to be at higher risk.

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Anyone with an increased risk for complications that develops flu symptoms should contact their physician or clinic right away. Antiviral medications are most effective when started within 48 hours of illness onset.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone six months and older get vaccinated for influenza. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to fully protect against the flu. Some children under nine may need two doses of flu vaccine.

What people can do to protect themselves and their families:
- Get the flu shot.
- Wash hands often, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with elbow or tissue.
- Stay at home if sick, and if asked, wear a mask.
- If sick and at risk of complications from the flu, contact your healthcare provider right away.

Flu vaccinations are offered at many doctors' offices, pharmacies, and even through some employers. The Flu Vaccine Finder and the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588 can help people find locations offering flu shots that are convenient for them.   Kitsap Public Health provides low-cost flu shots for children under age 19. No one is turned away due to inability to pay. Kitsap County residents can call the Health District at 360-728-2235 for information or to schedule an appointment.

The live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV), commonly referred to as the nasal spray flu vaccine, is not recommended for use this flu season because recent studies show that it does not provide adequate protection against the flu.

For more information, please visit the District's flu update webpage. The District releases its Respiratory Illness Report, available on-line, weekly during the flu season as a resource for medical providers. Anyone can subscribe to this report at www.kitsappublichealth.org/subscribe.

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