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General contact: Bonnie Widerburg, 971-673-1282

Program contact: Lorraine Duncan, 971-673-0283

Public health officials promote flu vaccinations

Every year, too many people in Oregon get sick or even die from influenza. This season, there will be plenty of flu vaccine and public health officials are encouraging people to get their vaccinations.

“We expect a record amount of flu vaccine this year,” said Susan Allan, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., state health director in the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division. “There should be enough to immunize everyone who wants to avoid getting sick. And just as important, you should get vaccinated to protect the people you care about, especially if you have close contact with someone in a high risk group.”

Oregon has now received more than 400,000 doses of influenza vaccine, compared to just 91,000 at this time last year.

Healthy people between ages 2 and 49 may choose the nasal spray vaccine FluMist[®] as an alternative to the injectable vaccine. Allan said FluMist[®] has been found to be 55 percent more successful than injectable vaccination in protecting children from influenza.

“Each year, more than 20,000 children under age 5 are hospitalized because of the flu and thousands more are taken to emergency rooms or clinics, Allan said. “Now children and many others can be protected without getting a shot. We hope this new form of flu vaccine will encourage parents to protect their children.”

Allan emphasized that vaccinations are especially important for people who are at high-risk of complications from influenza. Those groups are:

- Children aged 6 months to 5 years,
- Pregnant women,
- People 50 years of age and older,
- People of any age with chronic medical conditions, and
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

Protecting loved ones, colleagues and clients from influenza is also important. The following persons are also recommended for immunization:

- People who live with or care for people at high risk of complications, such as household contacts or out-of-home caregivers of children 6 months and younger,
- Health care workers, and
- School-age children. Children are especially likely to get influenza and to spread influenza, because the virus travels easily from person-to-person contact, and children in this age group spend a large part of their day in close proximity with each other. Children 2 to 17 years of age are twice as likely to get influenza as adults, including the elderly. For these reasons, annual vaccination of school-aged children is highly recommended.

Because pneumonia is often a severe complication of influenza, Allan advised people age 65 and older or those who have chronic health or lung diseases to ask their health care provider if they should also get a pneumococcal vaccination.

Influenza is characterized by abrupt onset of high fever, headache, sore throat, cough and muscle aches. Unlike other common respiratory illnesses, flu is associated with extreme fatigue and loss of appetite lasting several days.

It is estimated that almost 450 Oregonians die of influenza every year, while nationally flu kills more than 36,000 people every year.

Information on flu vaccination clinic locations and dates can be obtained by calling 1-800-SAFENET or on the Web at <http://flucliniclocator.org/>.

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