

Time to Get Your Flu Shot

The annual influenza (flu) season is about to begin and the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) announced recently that the first positive influenza test result was identified by the State Public Health Laboratories (PHL). This finding means that the influenza virus is circulating in the community and DHHS is encouraging all New Hampshire residents to be vaccinated against the flu at their earliest convenience, especially those who are at increased risk of complications.

Influenza can be a serious disease of the lungs, nose, and throat. The illness is spread from person to person through the air by coughing and sneezing. Typical flu symptoms include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. An average of 23,000 people die each year in the United States due to influenza. Last flu season in New Hampshire, 14 influenza-related deaths were reported. The vaccine itself does not give you the flu and is very safe.

The flu season usually lasts from October through May, so the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and DHHS recommend that everyone who is at least six months of age be vaccinated as soon as they can early in the season. The vaccine is available in the traditional shot form for people six months of age and older and in a nasal mist form for healthy people aged 2–49 years who are not pregnant. Residents are encouraged to check with schools, pharmacies, their healthcare provider, or wherever is the most convenient location to be vaccinated.

While everyone should get a flu vaccine this season, it is especially important for some people to get vaccinated for their own safety, including the following groups:

- Children aged 6 months through 4 years of age
- Pregnant women
- Adults 65 years of age or older
- People who are immunosuppressed
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions, including asthma, heart disease, diabetes, or chronic lung disease

People who live with or care for those at high risk of flu complications should also be vaccinated including:

- Health care workers
- Household contacts of persons at high risk of complications from the flu
- Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children younger than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

For more information on influenza and the vaccine, contact the NH Immunization Program at 1-800-852-3345 x 4482 or 603-271-4482 or the Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at 1-800-852-3345 x 0279 or 603-271-0279. Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov for more information or the DHHS website at www.dhhs.nh.gov.