

H1N1 influenza takes toll; vaccination most effective protection against flu

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Thus far, the 2009-10 H1N1 flu season has resulted in the death of 61 Coloradans, according to officials at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Flu-related deaths are reported on the department's web site at <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/Influenza/index.html>.

"H1N1 flu cases continue to be reported in the state—and the good news is there is an ample vaccine supply for all Coloradans who want to be protected from this flu," said Ned Calonge, chief medical officer.

"During this week, National Influenza Vaccination Week, the tragic flu-related deaths are an important reminder of the importance of vaccination. Flu vaccinations are our best defense against this disease, and it's not too late to get vaccinated against H1N1 influenza."

People ages 50 to 64 had the highest H1N1 flu-related death rate of 1.94 per 100,000 of the population. While the pediatric death rate was 0.83 per 100,000, the 11 pediatric deaths this season marked the second-highest number of pediatric flu-related deaths since the state began tracking in the 2003-04 flu season, when there were 12 deaths.

For four consecutive flu seasons between 2004 and 2007, there had not been more than two pediatric deaths in any season. Last flu season, 2008-09, that number jumped to seven pediatric deaths from flu.

Flu-related hospitalizations also are tracking much higher this flu season compared to last season. Flu-related hospitalizations have doubled, from 1,004 last season to 2,016 so far this season.

Very young children have been hospitalized at a very high rate this flu season, as has been seen in past flu seasons. Children younger than 6 months old represent just 5.5 percent of all hospitalizations but have the highest hospitalization rate (312 hospitalizations per 100,000 population in that age group), which is nearly 10 times the hospitalization rates for the age groups 5-18 years, 19-24 years, and 25-49 years.

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“It is not too late to get vaccinated to protect yourself from H1N1 flu,” added Calonge. “While the H1N1 wave appears to be well behind us, it’s difficult to predict how the virus will behave through the rest of the usual flu months, or in the upcoming spring and summer.

Vaccination will protect us against additional outbreaks or sporadic infections until next year’s season, so we are encouraging Coloradans to get immunized.”

For more information on flu, including locations of flu clinics, visit the Colorado Adult Immunization Coalition’s Web site at <http://www.immunizecolorado.com> or call Colorado’s CO HELP hotline at 1-877-462-2911.