

Vaccination takes a shot at flu this season

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Flu shots take a good stab at warding off the flu, and reduced-price clinics are under way in Holyoke.

Family Practice of Holyoke sponsors the seasonal clinics at SunSet View Community Center four nights in a two-week period.

Family Practice manager Sheila Robinson said last week's clinics found them giving 104 flu shots on Tuesday and 82 on Thursday.

Flu shot clinics were also scheduled this week at SunSet View on Tuesday and Thursday from 5:30-7 p.m.



Alex Brinkema, age 1, takes it all in stride as his turn comes up for a flu shot at the Tuesday, Oct. 8 clinic coordinated by Melissa Memorial Hospital staff at SunSet View Community Center. Pictured from left are Shawn Borland, Sheila Robinson, Alex and his dad Ross Brinkema and his supportive cousin, Marren Dirks.□□

—Enterprise photo

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With very few exceptions, everyone who is at least 6 months of age should get a flu vaccine this season, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Robinson said they've had all ages of people at the local flu clinics, including quite a few children. She said the kids have been great in tolerating the shots.

Melissa Memorial Hospital pharmacy director Pat Notter confirmed that the local flu clinics administer the standard three-strand or trivalent vaccines.

CDC explains that the seasonal flu vaccine protects against the influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season. The trivalent vaccine protects against an influenza A (H1N1) virus, an influenza A (H3N2) virus and an influenza B virus.

Notter said there is an egg-free trivalent shot and a nasal spray vaccine on the market, but those are not available through MMH.

CDC recommends three actions to fight the flu.

—Take time to get a flu vaccine.

—Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs.

—Take flu antiviral drugs if prescribed by a doctor.

Influenza is a serious disease that can lead to hospitalization and sometimes even death. The seasonal flu season in the United States can begin as early as October and last as late as May.

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During this time, flu viruses are circulating in the population. CDC emphasizes that an annual flu vaccine is the best way to reduce the chances for getting season flu and spreading it to others.

When more people get vaccinated against the flu, less flu can spread through that community.

Robinson said that as of Monday, Oct. 14, no reported cases of influenza had been seen at Family Practice of Holyoke.

CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses. Vaccination of high-risk persons is especially important to decrease their risk of severe flu illness.

People at high risk of serious flu complications include young children, pregnant women, people 65 years and older and people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease.

Vaccination is also important for health care workers and others who live with or care for high-risk people. Notter said the flu vaccine has been offered to all hospital employees as they take their responsibility to the community seriously.

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine.

CDC says a flu vaccine is needed every year because flu viruses are constantly changing. Also, multiple studies conducted over different seasons and across vaccine types and influenza virus subtypes have shown that the body's immunity to influenza viruses declines over time.

Flu-like symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches,

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headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

Preventive actions to stop the spread of germs include such things as avoiding close contact with sick people, washing one's hands often with soap and water and cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.

If one is sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends staying home for at least 24 hours after a fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. While sick, people should limit contact with others as much as possible.

CDC also says to avoid touching one's eyes, nose and mouth as germs spread this way.

CDC notes that antiviral drugs can treat the flu. They are a prescription medicine but are different from antibiotics. They can make illness milder and shorten the time one is sick. Additionally, they may prevent serious flu complications.

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