



It's not too late to get a flu vaccination

Officials designate week for reminder

By **Jamie-Leigh Bissett**
Delaware State News

DOVER — It's the second week in December, which means it is too late to get a flu vaccine, right?

Not true, says Dr. Martin Luta, chief of the Bureau of Communicable Disease with the Delaware Division of Public Health, which is why this week has been dedicated as National Influenza Vaccination Week.

"Traditionally, most people tend to think right now is too late to get a vaccine," he said, adding the number of vaccines administered each year tends to drop off significantly after the Thanksgiving holiday. "That is why we have this week as a reminder to both providers and to the public.

"For the public, it is never too late to vaccinate. For the providers, continue vaccination activity as long as there is flu activity in the community."

Dr. Luta said the misconception about when it is too late to get a vaccination was likely caused by the misconception that December is the midpoint of the flu season.

"A true midpoint, there isn't one. Each flu season is unique," he said. "A midpoint

depends on when the peak is, and it generally peaks in January," although sometimes it can peak even later than that.

Dr. Luta said this year's flu season has "started out slow. We've only seen three cases in Delaware. That may mean it's a quiet season, or it may be a bad season and peak late. There is no way of knowing."

He said the influenza vaccination takes about two weeks to take effect.

"Even if you get vaccinated now, the level of (flu) activity is pretty low, so you'll be protected before it peaks," Dr. Luta said.

He added that even if someone were to get vaccinated in the middle of a peak, but they had not been exposed to the virus, they'd be protected from the virus because of the vaccine. Additionally, even if a person got the shot, but somehow became infected before it took effect, they'd likely only get a "milder form of the disease."

"There is always some benefit (to being vaccinated)," Dr. Luta said.

He said only those who are allergic to eggs, or who have had a severe reaction to the vaccination in the past, should avoid getting the vaccine. Even those who feel unwell before they are scheduled to get a vaccine can still be vaccinated with a physician's recommendation.

"Talk to your physician to decide wheth-

er the risk of the vaccine outweighs the complications of what you're suffering from. Usually, they will err towards the side of giving the shot," Dr. Luta said.

This year, the flu vaccination covers various strains of the virus, including the A/H3N2 influenza, the influenza B viruses and A/H1N1 influenza.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone 6 months and older get a vaccine. Those at high risk of serious flu complications include young children, pregnant women, people with certain medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, neurologic conditions, or heart and lung disease and older adults.

Dr. Ilka K. Riddle, director of the Health Unit for the Center for Disabilities Studies, College of Education and Human Development at the University of Delaware, said her organization is also spreading the word about National Influenza Vaccination Week.

"We want to make sure to get the message out there that it isn't too late to get vaccinated," she said.

Dr. Riddle's organization, the mission of which enhances the life of individuals and families with disabilities through education, prevention, service and research,

said it is not usually a disability that makes a person more susceptible to the flu, but the underlying health conditions that can accompany a disability.

"Just having a disability alone does not make someone at a higher risk for getting the flu," she said. "However, those with secondary health conditions such as asthma or diabetes puts people at a higher risk of getting complications from the flu, which is why we make sure people with all kinds of disabilities get a vaccination."

Dr. Riddle said the Health Unit is also urging Delawareans with disabilities to follow the CDC's three-step approach to fighting the flu which includes getting vaccinated, taking everyday preventive actions such as washing hands and covering coughs and sneezes, and correctly using antiviral drugs if a doctor recommends them.

Dr. Luta said those who would like a vaccine, but do not have health insurance, or do not have access to vaccinations through their physician, can find a listing of Delaware Public Health flu clinics, as well as additional information about the influenza virus in general, at flu.delaware.gov.

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