



Lewis County Public Health & Social Services

Health Beat

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Winter Flu Season Update

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While the world is watching and wondering about the novel coronavirus potential from China, it is important to remember that our winter flu season is in full swing. Novel coronavirus is a worry, but influenza is already a reality and much more likely to cause you harm here and now. We're seeing evidence in news reports, hospital emergency rooms, doctor's offices, and our co-workers. According to data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Washington is one of more than 20 states at the CDC's highest-level rating for influenza-like illness activity. Flu in Washington is widespread across the entire state.

Washington State Department of Health data reports that as of the end of January, 52 people with influenza have died in Washington this season – 47 adults and 5 children. For weekly, up-to-date information on flu in Washington, go to <http://bit.ly/2RFZlVt> and click on "Flu activity".

Even though annual flu outbreaks are as certain to happen as rain, four simple actions can reduce your chances of becoming a victim.

1. Get vaccinated!
2. Wash your hands often
3. Cover your cough
4. Stay home when you're sick.

Washing your hands and covering your cough are remarkably simple to do, and just as simple to forget. Why cover a cough? Like sneezing, coughing spews droplets into the air that contain viruses. According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, influenza A and B viruses can survive up to 48 hours on hard surfaces such as a doorknob, countertop, steering wheel, shopping cart handle, keyboard, or coffee pot handle.

Think of how many of these surfaces you touch in a day with your bare hands. Who before you coughed on that surface or touched it with dirty hands and possibly left you virus to pick up? Have you coughed and left virus for others? Frequent handwashing reduces the risk of virus entering your body and making you sick.

Flu virus can easily spread to others days before a person even knows they're sick. Adults can infect others one day before symptoms develop and for up to five days after becoming sick. Kids can spread the virus for 10 or more days. So, staying home reduces disease spread.

Now let's talk about vaccination. Even though January is often prime flu season, February is not too late to get your flu vaccine. Influenza viruses don't read calendars. Last year's flu season peaked in March. In some years there are two peaks, even into the late spring. Along with handwashing, vaccination is your best defense against the flu. According to the CDC, a few things are new with this season's vaccine, including:

- There is a better match to the viruses circulating in the U.S.;
- All regular-dose flu shots protect against 4 virus, not just 3;
- None of the vaccine viruses have been grown in eggs, eliminating that concern for people who react to egg products.

A Gallup Poll released in January 2020 showed the number of Americans who believe it is important for parents to get their children vaccinated has dropped from 94 percent in 2001 to just 84 percent in 2019. At the same time, 86 percent said they believe vaccines are *not* more dangerous than the diseases they prevent. Despite this apparent contradiction in beliefs, the science is clear – vaccines are safe.

If you do get sick in spite of your best efforts, stay home. Do not share your illness with others. If you are not sure if you have a cold or the flu, go to <http://bit.ly/2QEV0SZ> for a handy chart

that shows the difference between a common cold and the flu. It also offers suggestions on when to call your healthcare provider.

Yes, it's cold and flu season, but that does not mean you have to participate in the misery, too. Get vaccinated, wash your hands, and don't spread your germs to others. It's as simple as that.

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