



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

*"To protect and improve
the health and environment
of the people of Colorado"*

NEWS

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Colorado Sees Recent Large Increases in Flu Activity

DENVER-- Over the past four weeks, there have been steadily increasing numbers of flu-related hospitalizations and visits to health care providers' offices for influenza-like illness, according to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's influenza tracking system.

Although increased flu activity has been occurring throughout the state, flu-related hospitalizations have been reported mostly along the Front Range and especially from the Denver metropolitan area. From the week ending September 5, which was the official beginning of the 2009-10 flu tracking season, through the week ending September 19, there were 171 flu-related hospitalizations diagnosed and reported to the state health department.

Hospitalizations for influenza, whether 2009 H1N1 or seasonal strains, are one of the primary flu indicators being tracked by the state health department as has been done since 2004. So far, nearly all the current influenza viruses being detected by the department's laboratory are the 2009 H1N1 strain; this, however, could change as the flu season continues and if seasonal flu strains re-emerge.

Ken Gershman who is the chief of the department's Communicable Disease Program and is leading flu surveillance activities, explained it is impossible to track all individuals with influenza-like illness because there are far too many cases and most individuals do not see a health care provider and even fewer get tested.

"For most people, the 2009 H1N1 flu is a mild, but somewhat unpleasant illness, similar to seasonal flu," he said. "People with uncomplicated flu illness who are not considered "high-risk," based on age or medical condition, do not need to be seen by a health care provider and do not need to be tested for H1N1."

Gershman advised those with influenza-like illness who are not high risk to stay home until their fever has subsided without the use of fever-reducing medication for 24 hours. "If you are concerned, call your doctor if possible before making a trip to the office or the emergency room," he said.

High-Risk Individuals for Seasonal and H1N1 Influenza

Individuals who are at higher risk for complications for H1N1 and seasonal flu and may need to see a health care provider include the following

- infants and young children
- pregnant women
- people 65 years of age and older
- people of any age with lung disease (including asthma), heart disease, weakened immune systems from cancer, HIV or immunosuppressive medications

- people with kidney disease, diabetes or neurological and neuromuscular diseases
- people younger than 19 years with diseases requiring long-term aspirin therapy
- individuals with other chronic diseases

Signs that Individuals May Need to See a Health Care Provider

Signs that a child may be sicker and should be seen by a health care provider include the following

- difficulty breathing or fast breathing
- bluish or gray skin color
- fever lasting more than three days
- dehydration (no urination in 12 hours)
- severe or persistent vomiting
- not waking up or not interacting
- very irritable and not wanting to be held
- flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Signs that an adult may be sicker and should be seen by a health care provider include the following

- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- pain or pressure in the chest
- confusion or increasing lethargy (sluggishness)
- severe or persistent vomiting
- persistent fever and cough

Use of Antivirals Such as Tamiflu for Flu Treatment

Gershman explained that antiviral medications such as Tamiflu are recommended for all people hospitalized with a flu-related illness. For antiviral medications to be most beneficial in treating flu illnesses, they should be started within 48 hours of illness onset.

"For individuals without chronic conditions or who are not in a high risk age group, and who are otherwise tolerating the flu without the warning signs listed above, Tamiflu treatment is not recommended," he said.

State health officials encourage individuals to avoid the flu by getting seasonal flu and H1N1 vaccinations when the vaccines are available and to practice good hygiene by

- frequently washing hands;
- coughing and sneezing into the crook of your arm, rather than uncovered or in your hand;
- avoiding people with respiratory illness;
- staying home from work or school when sick, returning only after fever has subsided for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medication.

For information about seasonal or 2009 H1N1 influenza, call CoHELP at 1-877-462-2911 or visit the department's Web site at www.colorado.gov/nofluforyou