



Custer County Health Department
Creating a State of Health

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OSDH Encourages Flu Prevention Before the Holidays

As the number of influenza-related hospitalizations continues to increase, the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and the Custer County Health Department wants to remind Oklahomans to get a flu shot before upcoming holiday gatherings to prevent spread of the illness.

OSDH reports 63 hospitalizations associated with the flu since the season began in September. The number of flu cases is relatively high for this time of year, and public health officials are concerned that there will be an increase in flu cases during the holiday season. The highest number of flu-related hospitalizations has occurred among those who are older than 50 years of age, as well as children younger than 5, which are both groups at greater risk of experiencing severe illness and complications due to flu.

"It is important to stay home from holiday gatherings if you have symptoms of influenza which are fever, chills, body aches, and a cough or sore throat," said State Epidemiologist Dr. Kristy Bradley. "It is better to miss out on some holiday fun than risk infecting others. Flu can be especially dangerous for pregnant women, young children, the elderly, and those who have underlying health conditions such as asthma and other lung diseases."

Getting a flu vaccination is the most effective way to avoid this potentially serious illness. Influenza vaccinations are available at county health departments, medical providers and many pharmacies throughout the state. Everyone is at risk for influenza and the flu vaccination is recommended for anyone 6 months of age and older. Parents and family members of babies younger than 6 months of age, and those who live with or care for anyone at high risk for complications from the flu, are especially advised to get the vaccine.

It is important for those experiencing flu-like symptoms to consult with a health care provider as soon as possible. Antiviral drugs may be prescribed to treat the flu. These drugs work better for treatment when started within 48 hours of noticing symptoms. Influenza antiviral drugs may also be indicated as a prevention measure to protect those who have just been exposed to someone diagnosed with influenza and are especially vulnerable.

In addition to getting a flu shot, public health officials recommend the following prevention tips:

- Adopt a healthy lifestyle by eating nutritious foods, exercising regularly, and getting a full night's rest.
- Wash hands frequently using soap and water, or alcohol-based products such as hand gels when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Use tissues to cover coughs and sneezes, then dispose of them and wash your hands immediately. When tissues are not readily available, cough into your sleeve, not your hands.
- Stay home from work, school and other public places when feeling ill.

Visit the OK Flu View at <http://flu.health.ok.gov> for weekly Oklahoma flu updates and additional information about the flu.

To receive your flu shot visit the Custer County Health Department between the hours of 8am-4pm. You can also call with any questions about scheduling or receiving vaccinations at (580)323-2100 in Clinton or (580)772-5415 in Weatherford.

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