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County health officials monitoring flu

County offering free influenza vaccines

Cover your cough, wash your hands, stay home if sick, get a vaccine

FREEHOLD, NJ – Health officials throughout New Jersey and the United States are seeing increased influenza illness. Locally, the staff of the Monmouth County Health Department is also seeing increased flu activity reporting and they are closely monitoring this year's flu activity at Monmouth County schools, hospitals and nursing homes.

"There are three basic everyday actions that we can all use to protect ourselves and our loved ones from getting the flu," said Freeholder John P. Curley, liaison to the Monmouth County Health Department. "Cover your cough, wash your hands and stay home if you are sick are best ways to avoid getting and spreading the flu and many other illnesses."

An extra step in the flu protection arsenal is getting a seasonal influenza shot. The County Health Department will offer free flu vaccines at their office located at 3435 Highway 9 in Freehold. To receive a vaccine, call the Health Department at 732-431-7456 to make an appointment.

Participants will be screened by a registered nurse regarding risk factors and educated about the vaccine. A parent or guardian must sign a consent form for children six months to 18 years of age.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone six months of age and older be vaccinated against the flu annually. Flu shots are approved for use in pregnant women and people with chronic health conditions.

"If you haven't already done so, you should get this season's flu shot," said Christopher Merkel, Monmouth County's Public Health Coordinator. "This year there are several different strains of influenza circulating in our region. The flu shot is a way to be protected from some of the strains."

When a circulating influenza virus is different from vaccine viruses, it is still recommended that persons get a flu shot. Even if the vaccine might not provide complete protection against one of the strains, it still offers protection against the other influenza viruses that are present in the vaccine.

Influenza symptoms are cough, sore throat, headache, muscle pain, chills and fatigue. A fever may or may not be a symptom of the flu. Residents who have one or more of these symptoms are urged to stay home from work or school to avoid spreading the illness to others.

(more)

"Residents need to be vigilant in protecting themselves and reducing the spread of the seasonal influenza," said Curley. "We are in the usual peak of influenza season right now."

According to the CDC, most people with the flu have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. If, however, you have symptoms of flu and are in a high risk group, or are very sick or worried about your illness, contact your health care provider. For information about high risk groups, visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov.

The Monmouth County Health Department recommends that all residents avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too, and stay home when you are sick. Most importantly, wash your hands to protect yourself from germs and cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.

For additional information, call the Monmouth County Health Department at 732-431-7456, or log onto www.visitmonmouth.com.

The Monmouth County Health Department provides public health services for residents of the following towns: Aberdeen, Allentown, Asbury Park, Atlantic Highlands, Avon, Belmar, Bradley Beach, Englishtown, Eatontown, Farmingdale, Hazlet, Holmdel, Howell, Keyport, Lake Como, Manasquan, Marlboro, Matawan, Millstone, Neptune Township, Neptune City, Oceanport, Ocean Grove, Roosevelt, Shrewsbury Township and Union Beach.

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