

Influenza is contagious. According to the CDC, “flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or possibly their nose.”

Illness may last several days to a week or more before recovery. While epidemics of flu happen every year, the timing, severity, and length of the epidemic is unpredictable and depends on many factors, including the circulating flu viruses and the match between circulating viruses and those in the vaccine.

The CDC recommends influenza vaccination for everyone six months and older and should be given as early as the serum is made available to providers.

“It is early in the season but not too early to take preventative measures,” states Jamey Keen, Public Health Nurse for Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department. “Prevention is the key. Do not wait until you are exposed to think about getting vaccinated. Getting the flu vaccination is one important measure for prevention.

“Parents can also play a pivotal role in prevention of influenza by accurately calling in the symptoms of their children’s illness to the schools when reporting an absence and not dosing your child with Tylenol, or another fever-reducing medication, and then dropping the child off at school.

“The same prevention methods can be practiced by adults too. Don’t go to work or to the grocery store if you suspect you are sick or have the flu. Remember to cover your cough with a tissue or cough into your inner elbow, and wash your hands frequently.

“Help children, and remind them, to properly wash their hands frequently as well. Other measures include avoiding close contact with people who have symptoms and avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Practicing personal measures such as getting plenty of rest, reducing stress, exercising and eating right can also help with prevention of illness.”

Some people should not get vaccinated until they have consulted with their primary healthcare provider and includes:

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs.
- People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past.
- People who developed Guillian-Barre Syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously.
- Children younger than 6 months of age (influenza vaccine is not approved for use in this age group).
- People who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait to get vaccinated until their symptoms lessen.

If you have questions, or are unsure, contact your primary health care provider.

Fast flu facts include:

- It takes approximately two weeks to receive complete immunity from influenza after getting the vaccine.
- It is possible to pass the flu virus to others (be contagious) one day before the fever and up to five or more days after.
- Flu season typically peaks in February.
- Now is a good time to get vaccinated.
- Vaccination is particularly important for people with underlying health conditions such as

asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and chronic illnesses.

- For some people, catching the flu could be deadly.

For those interested, or for more information, please contact Jamey at 308-345-4223.