



News Release

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Flu hits peak levels in Washington

OLYMPIA — The flu has reached its peak, and 19 lab-confirmed flu deaths have been reported across the state since December. Only lab-confirmed flu deaths are reportable in the state, and many cases aren't lab tested, so the actual toll of flu is likely higher.

“The flu can be a serious disease,” said Dr. Kathy Lofy, interim state health officer. “People of all ages can get very sick. Getting vaccinated is the best protection and can help people avoid severe illness, hospitalization, and even death.”

The virus is widespread in Washington. Most confirmed flu cases across the nation and in our state have been the 2009 H1N1 strain, which is covered by this season's flu vaccine. A flu vaccination is recommended for everyone six months and older. It's especially important for people at high risk for complications from flu, including young children, pregnant women, people 65 and older, and people with certain medical conditions — such as asthma, heart disease, diabetes, and neurologic conditions.

Nationally, estimates from November showed that less than 40 percent of the population had been vaccinated against flu, leaving a lot of people unprotected. To best protect people and communities from flu, 80 percent or more must be vaccinated — that's the national goal.

The state health department produced a public service announcement and online ads with Washington families talking about why they get a flu shot and encouraging others to do so. The statewide flu prevention ads will run online, on the radio, and in social media through February. Radio ads will air on stations in the Seattle, Vancouver, Spokane, Yakima, and Tri-Cities areas.

Produced [public service announcements](#) and other flu resources and materials can be found on the [Department of Health flu news](#) Web pages.

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If you haven't gotten your flu vaccine, now is the time. It takes two weeks after vaccination to be protected. We expect flu to circulate in our state for several more weeks. Kids under nine years old may need two doses about a month apart. You can get vaccinated at many locations, including health care provider offices, pharmacies, and some local health agencies. Check the [flu vaccine finder](#) to find out where to get flu vaccine in your community.

Many people with flu have a fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, and fatigue. Antiviral medication can help. It must be prescribed by a doctor and it works best if started within two days of getting sick. It's especially important for persons at high risk for flu complications to start treatment right away.

The Washington State Department of Health buys flu vaccine for all kids through age 18. Kids can get the vaccine from their regular health care provider. Providers may charge an office visit fee and an administration fee to give the vaccine. People who can't afford the administration fee can ask to have it waived.

The [Department of Health website](#) (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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