

1 in 3 Americans already got a flu shot this year

December 3 2010, By STEPHANIE NANO , Associated Press

(AP) -- As the flu season gets under way, about 1 in 3 Americans have already been vaccinated, health officials reported Friday.

That's about the same rate or even a little ahead of seasonal flu vaccinations at this time last year, said Dr. Anne Schuchat, of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

"We find that very encouraging," said Schuchat, noting that the flu hasn't been in the headlines as it was last year during the swine flu global epidemic.

In a survey of adults and children, a third reported getting vaccinated, 15 percent said they would definitely get vaccinated and another 25 percent said they probably would, she said.

Flu usually peaks between January and March but was widespread a year ago because of swine flu. So far, flu activity nationwide has been low except in the Southeast, particularly in Georgia.

"Don't be fooled by the past few months. Flu is coming," warned Schuchat during a teleconference.

For the first time, officials this year are urging nearly everyone to get protected with a flu shot or nasal spray. The only exception is babies younger than 6 months.

Fears of swine flu last year helped boost vaccination for the ordinary flu to a record 40 percent of adults and children. Two shots were needed last year, one for winter flu and one for swine flu.

Most of the flu in the U.S. then was swine flu - the 2009 H1N1 strain. It killed about 12,000 people. While it turned out not to be as deadly as first feared, children and young adults were hit hard.

H1N1 was a "sobering reminder about the severity and unpredictability of flu," said Schuchat.

Schuchat said flu vaccine is plentiful; a record 160 million doses have been distributed. Each year, a different flu vaccine is brewed to match flu strains. This year's includes swine flu and two other kinds of influenza. So far, swine flu is trailing the other two.

In the CDC survey, two-thirds of the people vaccinated said they got it at a doctor's office, hospital or clinic. The rest got it at work or a store. The highest vaccination rate was in those 65 and older.

More information: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

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