

# Flu still at epidemic levels: CDC

January 25 2013, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter

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Children and seniors especially vulnerable; infections declining in some regions.

(HealthDay)—While flu activity remains high across the United States, there are signs that the number of infections may be leveling off, federal health officials reported Friday.

The [flu season](#), which got an early start in November in southeastern states, appears to be easing a bit in the South, Southeast, New England and the Midwest regions of the country. But infections are rising in the Southwest and the Northwest, the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) reported.

Hospitalizations and deaths—key indicators of a flu season's severity—increased again during the week ending Jan. 19. People 65 and older and young children are being hit especially hard this flu season.

Thirty-seven children have died from the flu this season, with eight deaths reported last week, the CDC said.

There's no system to report adult deaths from flu, but the agency said the number of deaths remains higher than the threshold used to declare a [flu epidemic](#).

The predominant strain of circulating flu this season continues to be influenza A H3N2, which typically poses bigger problems for young children and the elderly, according to the CDC. But, predominant strains can vary across states and regions of the country, the agency noted.

Forty-seven states were reporting widespread flu activity last week, and two were reporting regional activity, the CDC said.

The 37 [pediatric deaths](#) so far compare to 153 deaths reported during the 2003-04 season, which was another H3N2 season, the agency said.

An estimated 36,000 people die from the flu and its complications in a typical season, according to the CDC. From 1976 to 2006, estimates of flu-associated deaths in the [United States](#) ranged from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people.

Flu season usually peaks in late January or early February, but by November the flu was already severe and widespread in some parts of the South and Southeast.

The best defense against the flu remains the [flu vaccine](#) and it's not too late to get vaccinated, the CDC said. The agency recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get vaccinated.

This year's vaccine appears to be well matched for the circulating flu strains, the CDC said. A recent report put the vaccine's effectiveness at 62 percent. No vaccine is 100 percent effective. But if flu strikes, vaccination often results in milder illness, the agency said.

People can visit this [U.S. government website](#) to see where vaccine is available in their area.

As of Jan. 18, 133.5 million doses of flu vaccine had been distributed to vaccine providers in the United States for the 2012-2013 season.

Two antiviral medications, Tamiflu and Relenza, can reduce flu symptoms and the course of the disease. To be effective, however, they must be started within 48 hours after symptoms appear.

Flu symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, head and body aches, and runny nose. People at particular risk for flu and its complications are pregnant women, those 65 and older and anyone with a chronic illness. The [CDC](#) urges these people to get the [flu](#) vaccine, which is available as an injection or nasal spray and in a stronger dose for seniors.

**More information:** For more on flu, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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