

A mild flu season, and the end is in sight: CDC

April 12 2016, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—This year's flu season may not quite be over, but it's

clearly winding down and will be recorded as a relatively mild one, U.S. health officials say.

That's a far cry from the 2014-2015 flu season, which was a particularly early and nasty one. Last year, flu was severe, especially for people aged 65 and older, officials said.

Lynnette Brammer, an epidemiologist with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's influenza division, cited several factors that contributed to this year's relatively mild season.

One: there were no new viruses this year, so many people were immune because they'd been vaccinated before.

Two: this year's vaccine was a good match for the circulating viruses.

Three: "Overall, there was less flu out there," she added.

Last year, an estimated 40 million Americans came down with the flu, nearly 1 million were hospitalized, and 148 children died, according to the CDC.

Comparable numbers for this year's flu season aren't available yet, Brammer said.

Despite this year's mild season, 40 children have died from flu complications so far, Brammer said. Depending on the severity of a flu season, the CDC has reported anywhere from 40 to more than 300 deaths among babies and children in a year. So, the number of pediatric deaths this year is comparatively low, she said.

In a typical season, [flu complications](#)—including pneumonia—send more than 200,000 Americans to the hospital. Death rates linked to flu

vary annually, but have gone as high as 49,000 in a year, the CDC said.

This year's vaccine proved to be nearly 60 percent effective against the circulating viruses, CDC officials said.

"This means that getting a [flu vaccine](#) this season reduced the risk of having to go to the doctor because of flu by nearly 60 percent," Dr. Joseph Bresee, chief of the CDC's epidemiology and prevention branch, said in a statement. "It's good news and underscores the importance and the benefit of both annual and ongoing vaccination efforts this season."

That's much better than last year when the vaccine was only about 23 percent effective, because it did not contain the most common circulating virus—the H3N2 strain, according to the CDC.

Unlike last year, the most common flu strain this season is the H1N1 strain. "But H3N2 is still hanging in there, it's not going away," Brammer said. "We've got a little bit of everything out there."

Even though the [flu season](#) is gearing down, Brammer still advises people who haven't gotten a flu shot to get one. "At this point there is still a benefit, but not as much as if they had been vaccinated earlier," she said.

Virtually everyone older than 6 months of age is advised to get a flu shot every year. Exceptions include people with life-threatening allergies to the flu vaccine or any ingredient in the vaccine, according to the CDC.

Pregnant women are considered at high risk for flu and should get vaccinated. Women with newborns also need their [flu shot](#) to help protect their infants, who can't be vaccinated until they are at least 6 months old. Also considered at [high risk](#) for [flu](#) and prime candidates for a vaccine are seniors and people with [chronic health problems](#), such as

lung and heart disease, the CDC said.

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

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