

Flu hospitalizations, deaths increasing: CDC

January 27 2017, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)— Although this year's flu season appears to be an average one so far, more hospitalizations are being reported and deaths are increasing, federal health officials reported Friday.

And it will be several weeks before the season peaks, said Lynnette Brammer, an epidemiologist with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We are starting to see cases of severe disease and we are seeing excess deaths, most likely due to influenza," she said.

Even though deaths and hospitalizations are increasing, Brammer didn't describe this year's [flu season](#) as particularly severe. "It's looking like an average influenza season," she said.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says it's still not too late to get a flu shot. That's particularly important for the most vulnerable—the very young, the elderly, the chronically ill and [pregnant women](#), officials said.

The CDC doesn't track the number of adults who die from flu, but it does keep tabs on child deaths.

"Three more children died this week, bringing the total to eight so far, which compared with other flu seasons is pretty low," Brammer said.

Last year, 128 children died from flu-related complications, according to the CDC.

The dominant flu strain continues to be H3N2, which often signals a severe season that affects the oldest and the youngest the hardest, Brammer said.

On the plus side, this year doesn't seem as severe as most H3 years, she said.

H1N1 and B viruses are also circulating, Brammer said. "We probably

haven't seen H3N2 peak yet, and then it's possible we will see a wave of H1N1 and influenza B before the season is over," she added.

This year's vaccine contains all the circulating viruses, she noted.

The CDC recommends that anyone aged 6 months and older get a flu shot. Besides the elderly and the chronically ill, pregnant women are also a high-risk group.

Also, mothers of newborns need a [flu shot](#) to help protect their infants, who can't be vaccinated until they're 6 months old.

For people aged 65 and older, the extra-strength vaccine is a good idea, Brammer said.

Most years, the vaccine is between 40 percent and 60 percent effective, according to the CDC.

If you do get sick, there are antiviral drugs that can help. Tamiflu and Relenza are effective if taken early.

In a typical flu season, flu complications—including pneumonia—send more than 200,000 Americans to the hospital. Death rates fluctuate annually, but have gone as high as 49,000 in a year, according to the CDC.

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

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