

Cases of flu continue to mount across america

December 30 2019, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Flu continues to spread throughout the United States and

has reached elevated levels in nearly every state.

"We're still seeing an increase in activity, which is what we've been experiencing over the last few weeks," said Dr. Scott Epperson, an epidemiologist in the influenza division of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

So far the CDC estimates that nearly 5 million Americans have been sickened, 39,000 have been hospitalized, and 2,100 have died from [flu complications](#). Twenty-two children have died from flu—up three from a week ago.

Epperson said it's still too early to know how severe this year's flu season will be. But in most years, many millions fall ill, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized, and as many as 50,000 Americans die.

This year, doctors are seeing an unusual mix of viruses. In most years, flu begins with a wave of influenza A viruses like H1N1 and H3N2 followed by a wave of influenza B viruses.

This year, however, B viruses are the most common strains, except in the Northeast and Midwest where influenza A viruses are predominant.

Children under age 5 are the most vulnerable to influenza B, and kids make up the majority of those hospitalized, Epperson said. Older adults, who are vulnerable to all types of flu, also make up a substantial number of those hospitalized.

Be warned: Flu season is nowhere near over, and because flu is unpredictable, a wave of influenza A may be right behind the current wave of influenza B.

Epperson emphasized that flu isn't just a bad cold.

"Most people feel bad for a few days and get better, but as we've shown with the numbers of hospitalizations and deaths that we're reporting for this week, it can be very serious for some," he said.

"You know, 2,100 deaths are not something minor and that's why we really want to emphasize things like vaccination, antivirals and training people to keep themselves healthy during the influenza season," Epperson said.

The good news is that there's plenty of flu vaccine—around 170 million doses have been distributed. And it's not too late to get a flu shot.

"We still recommend that vaccination is the best and first step to protect yourself against [influenza](#)," Epperson said.

The CDC wants everyone 6 months and older to get a flu shot each year. This year's vaccine has all the A and B viruses that are circulating. While the CDC won't know for some time how effective this year's vaccine is, it's still your best bet for preventing flu or having a milder case if you get it.

Vaccination is particularly important for [pregnant women](#), people with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes or [heart disease](#) that flu could make worse, and anyone 65 and older.

If you do get sick, see your doctor, and if you are prescribed antivirals, make sure you take them, Epperson advised.

He also recommended taking everyday steps to keep yourself healthy, such as covering your cough, staying home if you are sick and washing your hands often.

More information: For more about flu, visit the [U.S. Centers for](#)

[Disease Control and Prevention.](#)

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