

Public Health Update

A Bi-monthly Newsletter on Current
Public Health Topics



Tri-County Health Department

Serving Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties
Phone 303/220-9200 • Fax 303/220-9208

Time and date: 3:00:00 PM 10/29/2002

Number of pages including cover: 5

- 4 page Newsletter

You have received this message based upon the information contained within our Health Alert Network Notification System. If you have a different or additional e-mail or fax address that you would like us to use please notify us as soon as possible by fax 720-322-1500 or E-mail at DECTCHD@aol.com

Public Health Update

October 2002

Influenza Virus and Guidelines for Vaccination, 2002/2003 Influenza Season

We are at the beginning of influenza season in the United States, which occurs anytime from late December through March. The "flu" is a common catch all term for a variety of illnesses, but there is a vaccine that can address the upper respiratory disease caused by the influenza virus. There are several other respiratory viruses that can circulate during influenza season and cause similar symptoms, of which the "common cold" is the most prevalent.

As a result of increased availability of rapid influenza testing and enhanced surveillance activities, Colorado detected more influenza cases during the influenza season last year (12/2001 - 6/2002) than in prior years. There were 442 confirmed cases in the Tri-County area, of which 235 were residents of Adams County, 173 of Arapahoe County, and 34 of Douglas County. Laboratory test results clearly do not provide the full scope of the disease since the majority of ill persons either do not seek medical care or are not tested for the virus. Statewide data from last season indicate that at the peak week (early February), 4.4% of patients seen by participating sentinel physicians were diagnosed with influenza-like illness.

Reported Influenza Cases by County and Month for Tri-County, Influenza Season 2001/2002

	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	Total
Adams	14	152	47	5	7	4	6	235
Arapahoe	7	99	51	3	2	4	7	173
Douglas	2	6	24	1	1	0	0	34
TOTAL	23	257	122	9	10	8	13	442
Median for 5 yrs.	2	11	15	3	1	0	0	51

Frequently asked questions about influenza:

How serious is influenza?

It varies from year to year but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that approximately 10% to 20% of Americans get influenza each season, an average of 114,000 persons are hospitalized, and about 20,000 persons per year die from related complications. Rates of infection are highest among children, but rates of serious illness and death are highest among the elderly and persons of any age who have underlying medical conditions that place them at high risk of complications.



Tri-County Health Department • Serving Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties
7000 E. Belleview Avenue #301 • Greenwood Village, CO 80111 303-220-9200

What are symptoms?

Influenza usually comes on suddenly and may include symptoms of fever, headache, tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion, and body aches. Symptoms start 1-4 days after the virus enters the body. Complications of influenza include pneumonia, bronchitis, worsening of chronic medical conditions (i.e., asthma, congestive heart failure, or diabetes), and death.

How is influenza transmitted?

The virus is generally spread easily by the coughing and sneezing of infected persons or by direct contact either with infected persons or contaminated surfaces. A person can spread the virus starting one day before illness onset and 3-7 days after symptoms start.

Is there treatment for influenza?

Yes. The antivirals amantadine and rimantadine are effective against influenza A (the most common strain of flu). Sanamivir and oseltamivir are effective against influenza A and B. These medications require a prescription from a physician and must start within the first 2 days after symptoms begin.

How NOT to treat influenza?

Do not give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever, without first speaking to a physician. Giving aspirin to children and teenagers who have influenza can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome.

Why get vaccinated?

Influenza is a serious disease and influenza vaccination (the flu shot) is the best way to reduce the chances of getting ill. To decrease the burden of complications from influenza, persons at high risk of complications and persons who are in close contact with those at high risk should receive an annual vaccine.

How well does the flu shot work?

When administered two weeks before exposure, the vaccine is 70-90% effective in healthy persons younger than 65 years of age and 30-70% effective in preventing hospitalizations from the flu among elderly persons. The vaccine may be less effective during years when the strain covered by the vaccine does not match the strain that is causing illness, however it matches 90% of the time.

Who should get influenza vaccine?

According to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP):

1. An annual flu shot is recommended for those groups at increased risk of complications from influenza:

- Persons aged 50 years or older
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities that house persons of any age who have chronic illnesses
- Pregnant women who will be more than three months pregnant during flu season
- Adults and children 6 months of age or older who have chronic heart, lung, kidney, weakened immune system, or metabolic disease, including conditions such as asthma and anemia
- Children and adolescents (aged 6 months to 18 years) who are on long-term aspirin therapy and therefore might be at risk for developing Reye Syndrome after influenza

2. An annual shot is also recommended for persons who can transmit influenza to people who are at increased risk of complications:

- Physicians, nurses, and other personnel in hospitals, outpatient care, and chronic care facilities who have contact with persons at risk of complications
- Household members (including children) of persons at risk of complications
- People who provide home care to persons at risk of complications

3. An annual flu shot is encouraged for:

- Children 6-23 months of age, their household contacts and out-of-home caretakers (this is the first year that this group is encouraged to get vaccinated)
- Persons who provide essential community services (such as police, firemen, etc.)
- Students or others in institutional settings (those who reside in dormitories)
- Anyone 6 months of age or older who wants to reduce the probability of becoming infected

When should influenza vaccination occur?

Most people need only one shot each year, however, children under 9 years old who are getting influenza vaccine for the first time should get two shots, one month apart. Groups recommended for influenza vaccine (Groups 1 and 2 above) should be vaccinated now, as well as children under 9 years of age getting the shot for the first time. All other vaccinations (Group 3 above) should be given in October or November; but even vaccination well into the influenza season can be beneficial.

Who should NOT be vaccinated?

The following groups should NOT get a flu shot before consulting with a physician:

- People who have a severe allergy to hens' eggs
- People who have previously had a severe reaction to the influenza vaccine
- People who have previously developed Guillain-Barre syndrome in the 6 weeks after vaccination

Are there reactions to the vaccine?

Mild problems caused by the vaccine include soreness, redness or swelling where shot was given, fever and/or body aches. Signs of serious allergic reaction can include difficulty in breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heartbeat or dizziness.

Where are the vaccines available?

Flu shots are available at public clinics or through health care providers. For a list of public health clinics offering flu shots around the state, residents can call the Colorado Influenza and Pneumococcal Alert Coalition/Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment flu shot clinic hotline at 1-888-692-0269 or 303-692-2633, or visit the Web site at www.immunizecolorado.com

Comments or questions, please call Tri-County Health Department at (303) 220-9200.

Information for this issue of the Public Health Update was taken from:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevention and Control of Influenza, Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), MMWR 2001; 51 (No RR-3). Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5103a1.htm>

Colorado Public Health and Environment. Colorado Influenza Surveillance, Summary of 2001-02 Influenza Season. Available at <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/////////influenza/main.htm>

Tri-County Health Department Selected Diseases by Date of Report Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas Counties 2002 Year-to-date Through September

