

Flu Vaccine is Your Best Shot to Prevent Illness This Season

Fall traditionally marks the beginning of flu season, which means that El Paso County residents should begin scheduling flu shot appointments to protect themselves and their families from this potentially serious disease. Every year in the United States nearly 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 people die from flu-related causes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to stress that flu shots offer the best protection from getting infected with flu and suffering from flu complications, such as pneumonia and hospitalization. This season, special emphasis is being placed on vaccinating children and their care providers because young infants—who are too young to be immunized—have the greatest chance for suffering the worst outcomes from flu.

During the 2007-08 season, nearly 10% of all reported flu cases occurred in children under 6 months of age. However, data shows that only 1 in 5 children under 2 years are being vaccinated for flu, and in 2007 only 71% of seniors older than 65 years received a flu vaccination. The good news is CDC is anticipating ample supplies of flu vaccine for the 2008-2009 flu season. Flu vaccine is recommended for all children ages 6 months to 18 years, adults over 50 years, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems or chronic health conditions. And with lots of flu vaccine on the way, anyone who wishes to reduce their chances of getting the flu can get vaccinated.

Severity of last season's flu activity and facts about this season's flu vaccine

Reported hospitalized flu cases in El Paso County during the 2007-2008 season were nearly 400% higher than the previous year and represented the highest volume of reported cases since 2003-2004. This significant spike in local flu cases corresponds with increased cases throughout Colorado and nationwide during the 2007-2008 flu season. Since flu seasons vary globally, federal health officials closely monitor activity in areas of the world where the flu already has occurred to help identify the most probable flu types in the U.S. for the next flu season—ensuring the best possible match between emerging flu viruses and the preventive vaccine. The make-up of the flu vaccine for 2007-08 has been completely changed from last year, and public health officials are optimistic that the vaccine will be very effective in protecting persons against infection.

How is flu spread and what are the symptoms?

Flu is a respiratory infection that is spread primarily through the coughs and sneezes of infected individuals or when people touch surfaces contaminated with the germ and then touch their own eyes or mouth before washing their hands. Common flu symptoms include fever, headache, tiredness, dry cough, sore throat and muscle aches.

Complications from the flu can range from ear and sinus infections to pneumonia and death. Anyone who experiences worrisome flu symptoms should consult with a health care provider.

In addition to flu shots, are there other ways to prevent the flu?

There are several precautions that people can take to reduce their chances of getting sick with the flu, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 15 seconds.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Visit www.elpasocountyhealth.org for additional flu information and hand-washing resources.

Where can I go to get a flu shot?

The Colorado Influenza and Pneumococcal Alert Coalition (CIPAC) maintains a Web site (www.immunizecolorado.com) and toll-free phone line (1-877-462-2911) with current listings of local flu shot clinics, dates and costs.

El Paso County Flu Activity Over the Years

Flu Season	First Flu Reported	Last Flu Reported	Seasonal Total
2004-2005	Mid October	Mid May	101*
2005-2006	Mid November	Mid June	104*
2006-2007	Early January	Early April	26*
2007-2008	Late November	Mid April	152*

**Confirmed hospitalized cases.*

2007-08 El Paso County Hospitalized Flu Cases

Age of Reported Cases	Percentage of All Cases
Under 6 Months	8.6%
6 Months to 17 Years	29.6%
18 to 59 Years	27.6%
60 Years and Older	34.2%

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