Flu Makes Early Appearance in Lewis and Clark County

A handful of flu cases has signaled an early start to the flu season in Lewis and Clark County this year.

As of Sept. 26, Lewis and Clark Public Health had received four reports of influenza A. None of the cases required hospitalization.

“Those probably represent the tip of the iceberg since not all flu cases get reported,” said Shelly Maag, nurse supervisor at the health department. “And they’re showing up almost a month earlier than last year. It’s definitely time to get your annual flu shot if you haven’t already.”

Public health officials recommend an annual flu shot for everyone 6 months and older to protect against the potentially deadly disease. The vaccine is safe and takes two weeks to become effective.

“It’s without doubt the best thing you can do to avoid this nasty disease and keep it from spreading to your friends and family” Maag said.

Most seasonal flu activity typically occurs between October and May.

Flu, or influenza, is highly contagious and can cause severe disease even in those who are young and healthy. High-risk populations like young children, the elderly, and people with chronic health conditions such as heart and lung disease and diabetes, are particularly vulnerable to serious complications.

While vaccination is the best way to prevent flu, other precautions include:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water.
- Avoiding close contact with sick people.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

If you do get sick, stay home and limit your contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

Flu shots are readily available throughout the community, from local medical providers and pharmacies. The health department offers them during regular walk-in clinics Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 1930 Ninth Avenue. No appointment is needed.

The mission of Lewis and Clark Public Health is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis and Clark County residents.
The health department has scheduled additional flu shot clinics for:

- **Lincoln**: Friday, Oct. 6, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., at Lincoln Community Hall.
- **Wolf Creek**: Tuesday, Oct. 10, 9 to 10 a.m., at Wolf Creek School.
- **Augusta**: Tuesday, Oct. 24, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the Augusta Senior Center.

For more information, call your medical provider or the health department’s flu hotline at 457-8904 or visit the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/current.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/current.htm)