Flu Makes Early Appearance in Lewis and Clark County

Lewis and Clark Public Health received three confirmed reports this week of influenza A, all in county residents under the age of 25. In one case the disease was severe enough to require hospitalization.

“IT’s definitely time to get your annual flu shot if you haven’t already,” said Shelly Maag, nurse supervisor at the health department. “Flu season is here.”

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 absolutely the best thing you can do to avoid this disease and keep it from spreading to your friends and family” Maag said. “Flu shots aren’t just about protecting individuals. They protect our whole community.”

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.

Exactly 100 years this month, the first cases of what was called Spanish influenza were reported in Montana. More than 3,200 Montanans died in the next three months due to this global pandemic. It ultimately killed between 50 and 100 million people, making it one of the deadliest natural disasters in human history.

“This anniversary is a good reminder that we need to take flu seriously,” Maag said.

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 health department has scheduled additional flu shot clinics for:

- **Lincoln**: Friday, Oct. 5, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., at Lincoln Community Hall.
- **Wolf Creek**: Tuesday, Oct. 9, 3 to 4 p.m. at Wolf Creek School.
- **Helena**: Sunday, Oct. 14, 1 to 4 p.m., at Halloween Fun Fest.
- **Augusta**: Tuesday, Oct. 23, 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., at the Youth and Senior Center.
- **East Helena**: Thursday, Oct. 25, 9 to 10 a.m., at City Hall.

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)