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This Flu Season, Get A Flu Vaccine

Flu season usually starts in October and continues through the winter months with peak activity in January and February. Influenza, commonly called "the flu," is caused by the influenza virus, which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs). Unlike many other viral respiratory infections, such as the common cold, the flu can cause severe illness and life-threatening complications in many people. Vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza.

To highlight the importance of influenza vaccination, especially among healthcare workers and first responders, the Santa Barbara County Health Officer and Fire Chief joined together this week to get their shots. Dr. Charity Dean and Chief Eric Peterson hope to set an example for the community and stress the importance of preparing for flu season. "Influenza vaccination of healthcare workers and first responders is critical because it helps protect the community we serve," said Dr. Dean. "Maintaining a healthy and vaccinated work force of firefighters and paramedics is also an important part of disaster preparedness," said Chief Peterson. "Since the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, we know we need to be ready for anything."

Every year, flu spreads across the country, from person to person, family to family, and community to community. The severity of flu illness can vary from mild to severe. When severe, flu complications can lead to hospitalization and sometimes even death. Even healthy children and adults can get very sick from the flu. Each year in the United States (on average) an estimated 5-20 percent of the population will be infected with the flu, and more than 200,000 people may be hospitalized during a single flu season.

An annual flu vaccination is the best way to prevent the flu and the flu-related complications that could lead to hospitalization and even death. Health experts across the country recommend that everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine. Yearly flu vaccination should begin as soon as the vaccine is available, and should continue throughout the flu season which can last as late as May.

Getting a flu vaccine is more convenient than ever before. Vaccines are available from your doctor and at many retail pharmacies. Many employers, schools, colleges and universities also offer flu vaccines. So, when you're out and about in your community and see signs offering flu shots, or when you visit your doctor for a routine check-up, remember: the flu vaccine is the single best way to prevent the flu. You can also find a flu vaccination clinic near you with the vaccine finder at <http://vaccine.healthmap.org/>

Flu shots are covered by Medicare and by most insurance plans. Please check with your insurance provider for coverage details.

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