

Flu cases on the rise

Influenza cases are rising in Oregon, and although the increase is expected this time of year, Oregon Health Authority officials say it shows flu season is off to a strong and early start.

It's also a good reminder that it's not too late to get a flu shot, said Paul Cieslak, MD, of the OHA Public Health Division.

"The winter months are a time when we find ourselves indoors a lot, gathering with family, friends and colleagues, and it's also a very good time for the flu virus to spread," said Cieslak, medical director in Public Health Division's Acute and Communicable Disease Prevention Section and the Oregon Immunization Program. "People can get a vaccination now and be ready for the festivities."

During the week of Dec. 4-10, Oregon laboratories reported 207 specimens that were positive for influenza. That's up from 134 positive flu specimens during Nov. 27-Dec. 3, and from 117 positive specimens during Nov. 20-27. Most of the cases have been influenza A, this season's predominant flu type.

Hospitalizations have jumped sharply in recent weeks, too. So far, there have been a total of 66 hospitalizations for influenza-like illnesses—based on monitoring in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties—since flu season began the first week of October. That includes 23 hospitalizations the week of December 4-10, up from 17 during November 27-December 3, and 13 during Nov. 20-26.

There have been no pediatric deaths attributed to the flu this season, officials say. The Public Health Division does not track adult flu deaths.

"While this is shaping up to be a heavy flu season, this uptick during this time of the year is fairly typical," Cieslak said. "Flu season doesn't usually peak until

late February or early March, so people can and should get their flu shots."

Flu is a virus that causes mild to severe respiratory illness and can lead to hospitalization. The virus kills thousands of people in the U.S. each year. People who are at higher risk of severe illness or death include children, adults older than 65, pregnant women and those with chronic medical conditions or weak immune systems.

The flu vaccine is the best protection against flu. It can take up to two weeks to become effective, so getting it earlier in the season is ideal. That said, it's not too late, since flu season usually lasts until spring. Vaccinations are recommended for everyone 6 months and older.

So far, flu vaccine manufacturers have shipped more than 1.1 million doses to Oregon during the 2016-2017 flu season. More than a million of these doses have been reported to Oregon's ALERT Immunization Information System as having been administered.

Other ways to help prevent flu:

- Stay home and limit contact with others if you are sick; that includes staying home from work or school when you are sick.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue out when you are done.
- Wash hands with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may have flu germs on them.
- Avoid getting coughed and sneezed on.

Flu vaccine is available from healthcare providers, local health departments and many pharmacies. To find a flu vaccine clinic, visit www.flu.oregon.gov and use OHA's flu vaccine locator tool.

APARTMENTS: Project projected to cost \$5.5 million

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to approve committing \$300,000 to the project, the amount still needed after all other funding sources were secured. Council's number-one goal for 2016 has been to secure affordable housing in Sisters and this project will go toward meeting that goal. Sisters currently has only 33 affordable rental units at Tamarack Village, which consistently has a year-long waiting list.

Kemper estimates the entire project will cost \$5.5 million. The LIFT fund money will provide about \$38,000 per unit. He said many different funding sources are essential in order to build the new project because it costs just as much to build affordable housing as it does to build market-rate apartments, and the costs aren't offset enough when the rents need to be affordable for people who make 60 percent of the adjusted gross income in Deschutes County.

The official announcement for the LIFT funds will be made January 6, 2017. Shortly thereafter Council will host an open house for the public to see and hear about the proposed town-house development, which will be built on currently vacant land behind the shopping center where Ray's Food Place is located, at the west end of Sisters.

Help make snow removal easier

Winter gave Sisters Country an ample helping of snow in December, and if predictions are accurate, we'll be getting some more.

Dave Vitelle of Bear Mountain Fire contracts for snow removal, and he and his crew have been exceptionally busy. He offered some tips to make snow removal more efficient and effective.

He recommends that drivers park their vehicles about a foot short of the curb. That way, clearing the sidewalk with an ATV with a blade on it is more efficient — not having to work around bumpers.

If you have to park your

vehicle on the street, park it at the end of a long row of parking rather than in the middle. That allows the plowing crew to clear a swath of parking without a major obstacle right in the middle of it and makes it easier to minimize plowing a vehicle in.

"That would really facilitate better service across the board," he told *The Nugget*.

Vitelle noted that removal crews have been very short on places where they can haul and dump snow, and he expressed his appreciation for Shane Lundgren, who opened up his industrial park property to allow snow disposal.



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

How you park has an effect on your snow removal.

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