

Influenza (the flu) is a respiratory disease, not a stomach illness. It is widespread in Perkins County and surrounding counties. Stay safe by getting a flu shot, washing hands and covering coughs.

By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

There are a lot of bad bugs out there and there are a lot of sick people in the area.

Anyone with symptoms of high fever, chills and body aches should seek medical attention within the first 48 hours, said Dr. Ruth Demmel of Colglazier Medical Clinic in Grant.

There have been some diagnoses of both Influenza A and B, but the majority of patients being seen are sick with other viral illnesses, she said.

The clinics are seeing all age groups with a mixture of illnesses.

Demmel said it's important staying well rested and hydrated.

"If you're ill, stay home," she said. "It's important to wash hands often and use separate cups at home, and in public, do the same—wash hands and use separate cups, and cover your mouth when coughing."

A week ago, a story in the Wauneta Breeze capped information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), American Red Cross, and the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department which serves Perkins County.

According to Myra Stoney, director of Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) the flu is very widespread in an eight county area, including the counties of Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Perkins and Red Willow.

Within Nebraska, Stoney said flu-like activity is increasing in some districts while decreasing in others.

Stoney reported the health department is seeing flu in several pockets throughout the health district in schools as well as an increase of hospital admissions for flu-like symptoms.

There has also been an increase in positive laboratory tests for flu in the region.

Most healthy adults can infect others with the flu beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five to seven days after becoming sick, says the CDC.

High Risk Populations

According to the CDC, children under five, adults over 65 and pregnant women are considered as high risk for developing flu-related complications.

Two individuals, a child and a man in his 60s, have recently died from the flu, according to a release by Nebraska Health and Human Services.

Nationally 68,000 deaths each year are caused by the flu.

Children can be more susceptible to flu complications. Nationally, 18 children have died from flu this season, according to the CDC. Vaccination is one of the best ways to protect children from the flu.

Stoney said the national goal is to have 70 percent of the population get their flu shot each year, but that in SWNPHD's district they are seeing less than 30 percent of the population

getting a flu shot.

Flu is Respiratory Disease, Not a Stomach Illness

Stoney said many people confuse the flu as a stomach virus. The CDC describes influenza (flu) as a respiratory disease with symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, muscle or body aches, headaches and fatigue.

The CDC reports that although oftentimes people use the term “stomach flu” to describe nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, these symptoms are caused by many different viruses, bacteria or parasites.

Although these symptoms can be present with the flu, it is more commonly seen in children than adults and these symptoms are rarely the main symptoms of the flu.

Flu Shot Myths

Stoney said one of the common myths about flu shots is that vaccinations can cause a person to get the flu.

The influenza viruses contained in a flu shot are inactivated (killed), which means they cannot cause infection.

Usually if someone experiences flu-like symptoms after receiving the vaccine it is because they had already been exposed to the flu.

It takes an average of two weeks for someone to build up immunity to the virus after being vaccinated.

Action Items

The CDC recommends flu vaccination for everyone six months and older.

It's not too late to get the flu vaccine, say health officials. The public is urged to get vaccinated.

Tips on preventing the spread of flu include hand washing, avoiding contact with sick people, staying home if you are sick, covering your mouth and nose (with tissue or sleeve) when coughing, eating healthy and getting plenty of sleep.