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'Be a Flu Fighter;' get a seasonal influenza vaccine

Editorial board | The Journal Gazette

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Flu cases continue to mount in the U.S., with health officials recently recording the first pediatric influenza-related deaths of the season. A few states, such as Michigan, Louisiana and New York, are seeing much higher activity than Indiana.

Influenza infections will undoubtedly soon spike in northeast Indiana, and the Allen County Health Department and Super Shot are leading a community campaign to boost flu vaccination rates. “Be a Flu Fighter” encourages everyone 6 months and older to get an annual flu shot to prevent serious illness.

Options include the no-needle FluMist and high-dose shots for seniors, which are available at doctor’s offices, pharmacies and Super Shot clinics.

Data released Friday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows the hospitalization rate nationwide jumped by 14.3% compared to the previous week. More than 9,000 people were admitted with flu-like illnesses, defined as a temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, along with a cough or sore throat.

“By the end of the flu season, every state will experience high amounts of influenza activity,” Dr. Andrew Pekosz, an infectious disease specialist with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said during a Dec. 23 public health media briefing. “We just don’t know exactly when each state will start and end in terms of those outbreaks.”

New Jersey and Rhode Island are also experiencing “very high” levels of flu activity according to the latest data, for the week that ended Dec. 13. The CDC also found high activity in New Mexico, Idaho, Michigan, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, the District of Columbia, Connecticut, Maryland and Massachusetts.

Data shows the “super flu” strain, or subclade K, is spreading everywhere that influenza is. Lab tests found that 89.8% of 216 influenza A viruses collected since Sept. 28 were positive for the subclade K, according to the CDC.

Flu seasons often don’t peak until February, so it’s not too late to get vaccinated against the flu and other respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19 and the respiratory syncytial virus.

Allen County health officials are encouraging area residents to use the mitigation efforts learned and practiced during the worst of the COVID pandemic — staying home when sick, washing hands frequently, wearing a mask when in public or large crowds and getting the COVID booster and the seasonal flu vaccine.

Nationwide, about 3,833 people have been hospitalized with lab-confirmed flu since the start of October, according to the CDC. The federal agency also estimates significantly higher numbers for total illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths, with around 11,000 hospitalizations estimated by early December, and 1.1 million illnesses so far this season.

Northeast Indiana knows how to slow the spread of airborne viruses such as coronavirus and influenza. Social distancing, frequent hand washing, wearing a mask in public and getting vaccinated can protect you and your family from infection and reduce the strain on area hospitals and their staff.

Be a Flu Fighter; get a seasonal influenza vaccine.

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