

Flu is on the rise, says DHHS

Nebraska's level of flu activity has gone up a notch, and health officials are saying that people should get flu shots and take precautions.

The state's level of flu activity reported to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention went from "sporadic" to "regional" because two or more regions in the state are reporting significant numbers of flu cases, while the rest of the state is experiencing flu here and there, according to the state's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Joann Schaefer of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Division of Public Health.

"Late January and early February are usually when we see flu cases peak," Dr. Schaefer said. "It's still not too late to get a flu shot."

The virus is spread person to person primarily through drop-lets released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, nasal congestion, dry cough and muscle aches, which may last five to seven days or more. The people most at risk for serious complications like pneumonia are infants, the elderly and people with heart conditions and lung or kidney disorders.

Ways to avoid getting the flu, according to DHHS:

- Get vaccinated. It's not too late.
- Avoid close contact with others who are sick.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an antibacterial lotion.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

People who get the flu should:

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid using alcohol and tobacco.
- Take medication according to directions to relieve symptoms.

Antibiotics don't work on viruses, so people should not ask their physicians for a prescription, Dr. Schaefer said.

For more information about flu go to www.dhhs.ne.gov.