

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# **DPHHS: Take action to prevent the flu**

## *Flu cases identified in four counties*

The Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) and local public health officials are encouraging all Montanans six months of age and older to take action and get vaccinated now against influenza (flu) in order to decrease their risk of becoming ill.

In Montana, the flu season usually peaks in February and lasts through May; however, influenza outbreaks can be unpredictable. It is best to get vaccinated before the influenza virus starts circulating in your community. Officials say the vaccine is now readily available and being vaccinated before the end of October is recommended. While early, Montana has already identified cases of influenza in several counties, including: Big Horn, Gallatin, Lewis and Clark, and Missoula.

The influenza vaccine is the best form of protection against the flu and provides protection throughout the entire season, even when vaccinated in the early fall. The composition of the flu vaccine is reviewed and updated yearly to better match circulating viruses. It is important to remember that the influenza vaccine takes about two weeks to provide protection against the flu.

“Everyone is at risk for complications of the flu,” said DPHHS Director Sheila Hogan. “Getting vaccinated now will help not only you, but those around you.”

Influenza vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, doctor visits, missed work or school, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations and deaths. Last flu season, DPHHS recorded over 10,000 cases, 979 hospitalizations, and 79 deaths related to influenza. Of those hospitalized, half had not received an influenza vaccine.

In addition to getting the flu vaccine, everyday preventive actions like staying away from sick people, stay home from work or school if you are sick, covering your cough, and washing your hands with soap and water can reduce the spread of germs. Influenza vaccine is available at doctor offices, county or tribal health departments, and many pharmacies.

“Talk to your healthcare professional if you have questions about vaccines and what flu vaccine is right for you,” Hogan said.

More information can be found at the DPHHS website: [www.flu.mt.gov](http://www.flu.mt.gov)