

# NEWS

*“Improving and Protecting the Health, Well-Being and Self-Reliance of All Montanans.”*



Department of Public Health and Human Services

[www.dphhs.mt.gov](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 4, 2012

Contact: Jon Ebelt, Public Information Officer, DPHHS, (406) 444-0936  
Chuck Council, Communications Specialist, DPHHS, (406) 444-4391

## DPHHS reports increase in influenza activity

*Officials say it's not too late to vaccinate*

Local and state public health officials are reporting an increase in influenza activity and reminding all Montanans that it is not too late to vaccinate – get your influenza vaccine today!

“Influenza season typically peaks in February and can last as late as May,” says Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services Director Anna Whiting Sorrell. “We are encouraging people who have not yet been vaccinated to get vaccinated now.”

Each year, millions of people are infected with influenza, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized, and thousands die from its complications.

Public health officials stress that every Montanan aged 6 months and older should receive influenza vaccine each year. Getting vaccinated protects the person getting the vaccine and the community. The influenza vaccine is available in two forms: a shot and a nasal spray. The nasal spray is for use in healthy people ages 2 to 49 years who are not pregnant.

Anyone can get influenza, but some people are at greater risk for serious complications. Influenza complications can include pneumonia, hospitalization, and even death. Getting the influenza vaccine is especially important for those at greater risk for complications. People at greater risk include:

- Children younger than 5 years old, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- Pregnant women
- People with certain medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, or heart and lung disease
- People 65 years and older

It's also important to get the vaccine if you care for or live with anyone at greater risk. It is especially important for those caring for infants younger than 6 months to get vaccinated because infants less than 6 months old cannot be vaccinated.

Getting the influenza vaccine is more convenient than ever. Vaccines are available from your doctor, local health department, and at many retail pharmacies. The annual vaccine supply continues to grow, so everyone who wishes to can get the vaccine.

Please remember: the influenza vaccine is the single best way to prevent influenza and its serious complications.

For more information about influenza or the influenza vaccine, talk to your doctor or nurse, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu> or call CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO.

**DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**



**Brian Schweitzer  
GOVERNOR**

**Anna Whiting Sorrell  
DIRECTOR**

---

**STATE OF MONTANA**

---

[www.dphhs.mt.gov](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov)

PO BOX 4210  
HELENA, MT 59604-4210  
(406) 444-5622  
FAX (406) 444-1970

Dear Montana Physician

Seasonal influenza vaccination is the single best tool available in the prevention of influenza and its related morbidity and mortality. Unfortunately, too few Montanans are receiving the influenza vaccine. According to recent estimates for the 2011–2012 influenza season, Montana ranked 47<sup>th</sup> among states in vaccination coverage (36.8%) for persons aged  $\geq 6$  months and 49<sup>th</sup> in coverage (42.4%) for persons aged 6 months–17 years.

Simply put, we have to do better as a medical community in vaccinating Montanans against influenza. Every Montanan aged  $\geq 6$  months and without medical contraindications should be vaccinated against influenza during the 2012–2013 influenza season.

We strongly encourage you to consider using some or all of the following activities in your daily practice; each is an evidenced-based method proven to increase vaccination coverage:

1. Use of **standing orders**. Those patients meeting certain criteria (i.e., age, absence of a medical contraindication) should be vaccinated; this eliminates the need for individual physician's orders for each patient.
2. Use of **computerized record reminders**.
3. Use of **chart reminders**.
4. Use of **mail or telephone reminders**.

Free resources for this season's influenza season can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/freeresources/>.

Thank you very much for helping to improve the health of Montanans by ensuring every eligible patient is vaccinated against seasonal influenza.

Sincerely,

Steven D. Helgerson, MD, MPH  
State Medical Officer  
[shelgerson@mt.gov](mailto:shelgerson@mt.gov)  
(406) 444-7374