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Time To Get Your Seasonal Flu Shot

It's that time of year again; time to start thinking about getting your flu shot. In anticipation of an active and busy flu season, the Black Hawk County Health Department is initiating their flu season activities early, starting September 1st. Flu season is right around the corner and simply planning for protection from seasonal influenza (also called the flu) is a good place to start. The flu is a contagious illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year from your healthcare provider. Vaccinations come in a nasal-spray or the traditional skin injection varieties. Your healthcare provider can let you know which is right for you.

Although anyone wanting to reduce the chances of getting the flu can get vaccinated, certain people should get vaccinated each year because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications. People recommended for seasonal influenza vaccination during the 2009-2010 season remain the same as the previous season. Black Hawk County Health Department is encouraging the following groups for vaccination:

- Children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday
- Pregnant women
- People 50 years of age and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu

The best defense to protect your family is to stop the spread of germs.

- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing by using your sleeve or a tissue
- Wash hands often using soap for at least 15-20 seconds
- Throw away tissues after using them
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers when soap and water are not available
- Clean commonly used surfaces often (e.g., desks, handrails, doorknobs).
- If you are ill, stay home to protect others.

Symptoms of seasonal influenza include: fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, and in some cases, stomach symptoms (more common in children).

Antiviral drugs are used to treat the symptoms of influenza and are not a substitute for getting a flu vaccine. Antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptom onset) and are most successful to lessen the severity of your symptoms, shorten the duration of illness by 1 or 2 days, and may make you less contagious to others.