



NEWS RELEASE

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Influenza Season Has Officially Begun with Three Confirmed Cases

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Utah public health officials have announced that the official Influenza season has begun with three confirmed cases in Utah. All three cases are in infants and are Type A.

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and local health departments expect to have enough influenza (flu) vaccine to accommodate the need if Utahns follow the order in which vaccine is recommended. Limited amounts of the vaccine are now available for individuals at highest risk of complications from influenza. Persons not at high risk are encouraged to wait until November and December when more vaccine arrives. Vaccination through December and even later is effective in most flu seasons.

Utah's flu season typically runs from December through March with the peak occurring in early February. With the peak of Utah's flu season coinciding with the opening of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, the UDOH is recommending that Olympic volunteers and workers receive the vaccine after the identified priority groups have been served. Olympic activities will increase the possibility for exposure to influenza due to large crowd settings. Olympic volunteers and workers should consider vaccination in December when the high-risk individuals have been vaccination.

The UDOH, local health departments and the Utah Adult Immunization Coalition is urging all health care providers who provide the influenza vaccine to ensure that high-risk patients receive priority for vaccination. High-risk individuals include:

- Persons 65 and older (Beginning in November persons ages 50+ are recommended)
- Residents of nursing homes and chronic care facilities, including care givers and health care workers who have close contact with persons at high risk for complications from influenza.
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- Adults and children with serious illnesses such as heart or lung disease and asthma
- Adults and children who have had medical treatment or hospitalization during the past year because of severe diseases such as diabetes or immunosuppression
- Children and teenagers 6 months to 18 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- Women who will be in their second or third trimester of pregnancy during the influenza season

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Influenza is a very contagious viral infection of the respiratory system. Symptoms of influenza include fever, muscle aches, headache, congestion, runny nose, cough, sore throat, and general weakness. These symptoms usually appear one to three days after a person has been exposed to the virus. The influenza virus is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes and sprays droplets that can be inhaled by others.

The best means of preventing influenza is by vaccination. Because the viruses that cause influenza change often, an influenza vaccination should be received every year. Hand washing, when done correctly, is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. There is more to hand washing than you think! By rubbing your hands vigorously with soapy water, you pull the dirt plus the oily soils free from your skin. The soap lather suspends both the dirt and germs trapped inside and are then quickly washed away.

During the 2000-2001 flu season there were 129 laboratory-confirmed flu cases reported in Utah. But since most patients with flu don't get tested, this number is only an indicator representing the thousands of Utahns who likely contracted the flu last year.

The UDOH recommends that high-risk individuals also receive the pneumonia vaccine because pneumonia is a major complication resulting from influenza. Pneumonia vaccine can be given year round and is usually given just once in a lifetime.

For more information about influenza and pneumonia vaccinations and locations where the vaccines are available, call the Utah Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659.