



Public Health
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Panhandle Health District

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Healthy People in Healthy Communities

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NEWS RELEASE

Health District Reports First Flu Deaths

Panhandle Health District – December 15, 2022

Three Kootenai County residents and one Bonner county resident, all over the age of 80, are the first reported influenza-related deaths in the Panhandle Health District (PHD) region for the 2022-2023 flu season.

Flu seasons vary from year to year in their timing and duration, typically ranging from late September to late December. Idaho has averaged 45 reported influenza-related deaths each year for the last five seasons, with most reported deaths among people over 65 years of age.

“We want to remind residents that flu can be very serious,” said Jenna Dowell, Clinical Services Division Administrator for PHD. “We are seeing an increase in flu activity in our area along with COVID-19, and RSV continues to circulate but we are hopeful that RSV has plateaued.”

The potential for elevated respiratory infections due to co-circulation of these viruses has been referred to as the “triple threat” or “triple epidemic” in the media. As families gather over the holidays, it’s important to be aware of those most vulnerable to severe illness, including people with chronic health conditions, pregnant women, young children, and anyone 65 years of age or older, and take precautions to prevent spreading these viruses.

It is recommended that those eligible consider receiving an annual influenza vaccine and be up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations. There is not a vaccine for RSV.

Receiving the influenza vaccine every year is especially important for people at higher risk for serious flu-related complications. Healthy people should be vaccinated to protect vulnerable populations, such as elderly people and people who live in long-term care facilities, where they could be exposed to influenza by family and friends.

Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to determine which vaccines are best for you.

Symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headache, chills, or fatigue. Although most people who catch the flu recover after a few days, some can have serious complications and even die.

In addition to becoming vaccinated against flu and COVID-19, Idahoans can take other actions to prevent the spread of respiratory diseases:

- Wash your hands frequently or use hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth until you have washed your hands.
- Get plenty of rest, drink plenty of liquids, eat nutritious foods, and take part in physical activity to stay healthy.
- Stay home from work or school when sick.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Wear a mask and physically distance yourself whenever you are in public.

Call your local primary care provider, local pharmacy or PHD if you wish to schedule an appointment for a flu and COVID-19 vaccine. For more information visit www.panhandlehealthdistrict.org. Flu shots can also be found using vaccinefinder.org.

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Panhandle Health District provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.