

## MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Influenza on the Rise in Kitsap County**

*It is not too late to get a flu shot*

BREMERTON, WA— Influenza (flu) activity is on the rise in Kitsap County and is expected to continue to increase in the coming weeks.

Statewide influenza data indicates that flu and other respiratory virus infections are increasing, as is typical during influenza season. Harrison Medical Center is seeing a higher than normal number of elderly patients admitted to the hospital with the flu, and several local long-term care facilities have reported an increase in influenza. Statewide, there has been an increase in influenza, as well as infections with respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), corona viruses (colds), and the bacteria that causes pertussis.

“It is not too late to get vaccinated against the flu,” said Dr. Susan Turner, Health Officer for the Kitsap Public Health District. “The increase and severity of flu illness among seniors in our community is an important reminder that the flu shot is a key tool to protect ourselves and those we love, especially for people at higher risk for flu-related complications—like pregnant women and seniors.”

People at high risk who get the flu may develop serious complications, such as pneumonia, and the flu can make existing health conditions worse. This can lead to hospitalization and death. People at higher risk also include young children, pregnant women, and people with certain chronic medical conditions.

Anyone with an increased risk for complications that develops flu symptoms should contact their physician or clinic right away. Antiviral medications help, but they must be prescribed by a doctor and are most effective when started within 48 hours of illness onset. Any cough lasting longer than a few days should also prompt a visit to a healthcare professional.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone six months and older get vaccinated for influenza. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to fully protect against the flu. Some children under nine may need two doses of flu vaccine.

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According to the Washington State Department of Health, H3N2 flu viruses have been the most common type of flu circulating so far this season. More than half of those viruses have changed slightly from the strain that's included in this year's flu vaccine. Seasons when H3N2 viruses are most common tend to be more severe with higher numbers of hospitalizations and deaths. The flu vaccine still offers protection against the well-matched strains and may provide some protection against the changed strain.

"While flu infections so far this season seem to be a slightly different H3N2 strain, the vaccine still provides some coverage for H3N2, covers other flu strains, and can help reducing severity of illness," Dr. Turner added. "We have also been seeing more cases of pertussis, RSV, and colds, and the universal way to prevent these infections is to wash hands often, cover coughs, and stay home when ill."

**What people can do to protect themselves and their families:**

- Get vaccinated.
- Wash hands often; clean hands after coughing or sneezing.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with elbow or tissue.
- Stay at home if sick, and if asked, wear a mask.
- If sick and at risk of complications from the flu, see a physician right away.
- If a cough lasts longer than a few days, see a healthcare professional.

There are two types of flu vaccines –a shot and nasal spray. Flu vaccines are offered at many doctors' offices, pharmacies, and even through some employers. The [Flu Vaccine Finder](http://flushot.healthmap.org) (<http://flushot.healthmap.org>) and the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588 can help people find locations offering flu shots that are convenient for them. Kitsap Public Health provides low-cost flu shots for children under age 19. No one is turned away due to inability to pay. Kitsap County residents can call the Health District at 360-337-5235 for information or to schedule an appointment.

For more information on influenza, visit [www.kitsappublichealth.org](http://www.kitsappublichealth.org).

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For more information, please contact:

**Karen McKay Bevers**

Public Information Officer

360-307-4252 - office

206-718-3661 - mobile

[karen.bevers@kitsappublichealth.org](mailto:karen.bevers@kitsappublichealth.org)