

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Rick Scott
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Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SENIORS CARRY BURDEN OF INFLUENZA COMPLICATIONS

LEE COUNTY— Flu is preventable, yet seasonal flu-related deaths to seniors, 65 years old and up, are estimated to make up 90 percent of the annual total of flu losses. That is why the Florida Department of Health in Lee County is urging all seniors who haven't received their flu shot to get a high dose flu vaccine now, before the peak of flu season.

The high dose vaccine is specially formulated to protect the naturally diminished response of the aged immune system. It has four times the antigen found in the regular adult influenza vaccine, and protects against two A strains and one B strain of the virus. A strains are the most prevalent so far this year.

"Seniors are at higher risk for severe illness and serious complications of the flu compared with young healthy adults," said Pat Freve, RN, DOH-Lee adult immunization specialist.

"Approximately 60 percent of hospitalizations in the US are among seniors in that age group."

Hospital emergency departments in Lee County are reporting rising numbers of seniors seeking treatment.

The aging process decreases the body's ability to have a good immune response after getting the influenza vaccine. New studies show the higher antigen dose (the part of the flu vaccine that prompts the body to make antibodies to fight the flu) may give older people a better response. The vaccine is also believed to lessen the severity of the flu, if it is contracted despite getting the vaccine.

The CDC and the Florida Department of Health in Lee County is also urging physicians to identify and vaccinate their patients. People are up to six times more likely to get the flu vaccine when it is recommended by their physician and offered in doctors' offices.

DOH-Lee recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6-months old and up as the first and most important step in protecting against influenza disease. It is especially important for people who are at high risk for developing flu-related complications to get the vaccine. A full list of people at high risk of developing flu-related complications is available at:

http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm.

Other prevention measures include: stay home when sick, keep children home when sick and promote healthy habits such as washing hands often, keeping hands away from their face and covering their mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing and coughing.

DOH-Lee gives flu vaccine to adults and children at its main office 3920 Michigan Avenue, Fort Myers from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 1-3:30 p.m. on Friday. All children's vaccinations are free. Adult vaccines range from \$30-\$50. DOH-Lee will bill Medicare for adult flu shots. For more information go to www.leechd.com.

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