

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Secretary Designee Catherine Torres, MD

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**Dept. of Health Reports Twelve Influenza-Related Deaths So Far This Flu Season**

(Santa Fe) – Secretary Designate of Health Catherine Torres, MD, said today that there have been 12 influenza-related deaths so far this flu season and is encouraging all New Mexicans to get vaccinated against the disease.

The deaths occurred in Bernalillo, Chaves, Dona Ana, Eddy, Luna, Taos and Valencia Counties. Eleven of the deaths occurred among adults aged 22 to 54 years and one death was a child.

“We want to express our sympathies to the families who are dealing with the loss of loved ones due to the flu,” Dr. Torres said. “Getting vaccinated against the flu every year is the best protection we have to prevent the disease, which can lead to serious illness and even death. I encourage everyone, especially those who are at higher risk from developing serious complications to get a flu shot as soon as possible.”

It is important that people in the following groups get vaccinated, either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for people at high risk for developing flu-related complications:

- Pregnant women (any trimester)
- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- People age 65 and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, and lung or heart disease
- 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, including health care workers and caregivers of babies younger than 6 months
- American Indians and Alaskan Natives
- People who are morbidly obese

A November 2010 survey conducted in 20 sites around the country, including four New Mexico counties (Bernalillo, Sandoval, Santa Fe and Valencia) found that only 38 percent of adults and 36 percent of children 6 months through 17 years of age had received an influenza vaccination.

Anyone can get influenza, but rates of infection are highest among young children and death rates are highest among the elderly. Infants, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with certain health conditions – such as heart, lung or kidney disease or a weakened immune system –

can develop severe illness. Each year thousands of people die from seasonal influenza and even more require hospitalization.

“In addition to getting a flu shot, people should wash their hands frequently and cover their mouth and nose when they sneeze and cough to help prevent the spread of the disease to others,” Dr. Torres said.

New Mexicans should contact their health care providers to receive flu vaccine. The Department’s public health offices provide vaccine to people who are at high risk for serious illness or death and people who have no health insurance. Public health offices are listed in the phonebook’s blue pages under state government. Contact information for public health offices is listed at [www.nmhealth.org](http://www.nmhealth.org).

People can find information about the flu and flu clinics by calling toll-free at 866-681-5872 or looking up the Department of Health’s website, <http://www.immunizenm.org/flu.shtml>.

Many of the people at high risk for flu complications should also get a pneumonia shot if they have never had one. People who need to have the pneumococcal vaccine are: age 65 and older, and adults 19 and older who smoke, or have chronic health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, cardiovascular or lung disease, cirrhosis, chronic renal failure or are immunocompromised due to lymphoma, organ transplant, multiple myeloma or Hodgkin disease.

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