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CARING FOR NEW MEXICO

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Department of Health Recommends Current Flu Vaccines While Research is in Progress

(Santa Fe) - A recent study conducted at the University of Minnesota highlights the need for a new generation of influenza vaccines. The study reviewed existing published studies on the effectiveness of influenza vaccines. Although there are concerns about the effectiveness of influenza vaccines especially in those over 65 years of age, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conclude, after reviewing this study, that influenza vaccines are generally effective in preventing influenza.

It is recognized that current influenza vaccines have limitations in terms of how well they work, especially in specific groups such as the elderly, and the ability to “match” the vaccine to circulating strains. However, the current vaccines do prevent serious complications and deaths due to influenza. The nasal flu vaccine given to young children is particularly effective and can prevent children from spreading the flu to others. Researchers are working to make new, more effective flu vaccines.

“Continuing and expanding our influenza vaccination programs is essential to deal with this important infectious disease,” says Cabinet Secretary for the Department of Health, Dr. Catherine Torres. “The flu vaccine remains the best tool we have for prevention. The influenza vaccine has one of the best safety records of any currently used vaccine and the vaccine is relatively cheap compared to other vaccines.”

Everyone should get a flu vaccine each flu season, especially those 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
- Children younger than five, but especially children younger than two years old
- People age 65 and older (there is a high dose vaccine for people 65 years of age and older. In clinical studies, this vaccine produces an enhanced immune response compared to the standard vaccine)
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, and lung or heart disease
- People who live in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities



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- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including health care workers and caregivers for babies younger than 6 months
- American Indians and Alaskan Natives, who last flu season seemed to be at higher risk of flu complications
- People who are morbidly obese

To avoid catching the flu or passing it on to others, people should frequently wash their hands, cover their mouth and nose when sneezing and coughing, and stay home when ill.

Information about the flu and flu clinics is available by calling toll-free at 866-681-5872 or by visiting the Department of Health's website at <http://www.immunizenm.org/flu.shtml>.

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