



Joint News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Getting a Flu Vaccine Early is Critical During Ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic Berrien County Health Officials Urge Flu Vaccination for Residents

(Berrien County, MI) - The Berrien County Health Department and Spectrum Health Lakeland are urging residents to get vaccinated against the flu to protect themselves and their loved ones from the influenza virus. As the coronavirus pandemic continues to affect Berrien County communities, getting vaccinated against the flu is one of the best ways to reduce the amount of respiratory illness that is circulating in the area.

Every person six months and older should get the flu vaccine every year. Vaccination against the flu is especially important for certain groups who are considered at highest risk of serious flu illness, including young children, pregnant women, and adults who have chronic health conditions or are over the age of sixty-five. Flu season can be well underway by December and January, so it is important to be vaccinated before the flu begins to spread. Since it takes about two weeks for the flu vaccination to provide protection, experts recommend getting your flu shot before the end of October.

There are several locations where residents can receive a flu vaccine including scheduling an appointment with their primary care provider or visiting area pharmacies. The Berrien County Health Department will offer walk-in flu vaccinations in its clinic locations in Benton Harbor and Niles every Friday beginning on October 2nd through November 20th, 2020. In addition, drive-thru flu vaccination clinics will be held at the following locations in Berrien County:

- Wednesday, October 28th from 11am-4pm, Benton Harbor Charter Academy
- Wednesday, November 4th from 11am-4pm, Chikaming Fire Department
- Saturday, November 7th from 11am-4pm, Niles (final location to be determined)

“Getting a flu vaccination this year is more important than ever,” said Nicki Britten, health officer for the Berrien County Health Department. “We know COVID-19 will likely continue into the fall and winter, overlapping with the flu season. With the possibility of both viruses occurring in our communities at the same time, it is vital that everyone get their yearly flu shot.”

“Preventing the spread of influenza in our community will further reduce symptoms that could be confused with those of COVID-19,” said Loren B. Hamel, MD, president, Spectrum Health Lakeland. “Community flu vaccination reduces outpatient illnesses, hospitalizations, and intensive care unit admissions, while helping to protect our frontline workers and local health care system as we continue to care for people with COVID-19.”

While preventive actions recommended to reduce risk of COVID-19 such as wearing a face covering and social distancing may also help to reduce the risk of flu transmission, it is important to get the flu vaccine, which is a safe and effective way to prevent the virus altogether.

Additionally, these simple steps can help stop the spread of flu or other germs and help protect you from getting sick:

- Stay home when you are sick, which will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean your hands often, with soap and water or hand sanitizer.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

High-dose flu vaccinations and pneumonia vaccinations are also offered for those over age sixty-five. Most insurance plans will cover the cost for these vaccines, but no one will be turned away for an inability to pay. Find more information about the importance of an annual flu vaccination at bchdmi.org and spectrumhealthlakeland.org.

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