Yakima Health District

Media Release

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Getting a Flu Shot this Year is More Important than Ever

YAKIMA, WA- With the daily number of new COVID-19 cases starting to increase throughout Yakima County, the Yakima Health District is urging everyone to take health precautions, including getting a flu shot.

This fall and winter getting your flu shot is more important than ever as it will help reduce the spread of influenza and symptoms which can easily be confused with COVID-19. The two highly contagious respiratory illnesses are spread in similar ways, mainly through respiratory droplets. Influenza and common cold symptoms are similar to COVID-19, the only unique symptom that COVID-19 has over the other two is loss of taste and smell.

"Our community has been working together for months to limit the spread of COVID-19, and we've been successful," says Dr. Teresa Everson, Health Officer at YHD. "Another important strategy for maximizing community safety is to arm ourselves with the flu shot and stay up-to-date with all recommended immunizations. COVID-19 and the flu have similar symptoms and getting a flu shot can limit the number of people seeking testing or needing hospitalizations, which helps prevent an overwhelmed hospital system. Together, we can keep ourselves and the rest of the community safe from these infections."

Besides getting a flu shot, YHD encourages Yakima residents to continue to practice the following precautions:

- Wear a cloth face covering in public
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water
- Avoid gatherings with others outside your household
- Make sure you are current on all immunizations
- Get tested as soon as possible if you develop COVID-19 symptoms or if you have close contact with someone with COVID-19

To help drive home these health recommendations and spread awareness, YHD recently launched a new campaign encouraging residents to *Be a protector, not an infector.* The campaign mimics classic, retro videogames. In this version, the hero fights past flu and Coronavirus to reach a flu vaccine.

"We wanted this campaign to be fun and stand out. We know everyone is tired and experiencing pandemic fatigue, but we need these messages to connect so people understand we still have work to do," says Lilian Bravo, Director of Public Health Partnerships.

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With childhood immunizations dropping sharply during the pandemic, we are recommending that families think of the flu shot as an essential protective health measure. September 2020 flu vaccination rates for children in Yakima County are down by 38% when compared to September of last year. This fall local clinics will be partnering with schools to host mobile immunization and flu shot clinics to make getting your child caught up on immunizations and their flu shot easier. To see if you child's school will be holding one of these clinics visit https://www.yakimacounty.us/281/Flu-Prevention . If your child's school is not holding an immunization clinic you can contact your child's provider to get a flu vaccine

According to the CDC, the flu vaccine prevents millions of illnesses every year and reduces the number of flu-related doctor visits, hospitalizations, and deaths. Getting a flu shot also helps protect vulnerable populations, such as those with chronic health conditions, young children, and the elderly. Everyone over six months of age is encouraged to get a flu shot. While the flu shot will not protect you from COVID-19, it can prevent you from needing testing or medical care, so those services are available to others.

Where to get a flu shot

You can find a listing of flu shot locations at **yakimahealthdistrict.org**. Many pharmacies throughout Yakima are on the list of locations. You can also make an appointment with your primary care provider.

How to pay for a flu shot

The flu vaccine is covered for adults over the age of 19 by most insurance plans, Medicare, and Medicaid. Uninsured adults over 18 can get a free flu shot at participating providers, Safeway and Albertsons pharmacies, thanks to a partnership with the Washington Department of Health. Washington provides flu vaccine, and all other recommended vaccines, at no cost to everyone under the age of 19.

Additional Information:

Yakima Health District Flu Prevention

Flu Vaccine Locator

2020-2021 Influenza Shot Locations

2020 Adult Vaccine Program Providers

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