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## FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN SANTA ROSA COUNTY RECOMMENDS FIGHTING THE FLU WITH AN ANNUAL FLU SHOT



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**Milton, FL** - As flu activity begins to increase in our area, the Florida Department of Health in Santa Rosa County (DOH-Santa Rosa) is recommending flu shots for everyone over the age of six months. An annual flu shot can protect you, your family, and the community, and is especially important for those in high risk groups, which include children, pregnant women (or women who plan to become pregnant), those with chronic medical conditions, and adults over the age of 65. This year's vaccine protects against four strains of flu, two Type A and two Type B.

"We've been monitoring activity in our area on a weekly basis and, although it's still relatively mild, we are seeing an increase in reports of flu and influenza like illnesses," said Ashlee Turner, Biological Scientist III with DOH-Santa Rosa. "However, it's still too early to tell if this trend will continue. Typically, flu activity peaks from December to February, but it can last as late as May. It's really important to get that flu shot before we move into the peak season," she said.

It is a common misconception that a flu shot can make you sick. The injectable vaccine is made with attenuated virus which can produce an immune response without giving you the disease. It takes approximately two weeks for the body to develop immunity to the disease, so if you become sick in the meantime, you were probably exposed to the flu before you were vaccinated. Some side effects are possible, but they are generally mild and can include soreness and redness at the injection site, muscle aches, a mild headache, fatigue, and a low-grade fever.

The flu shot does not protect against all the different strains of flu circulating in a season, but even if you come in contact with a virus that is not covered by the vaccine, it will provide some protection, and you will not be as sick as you would be if you had not had a shot. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the flu vaccine also reduces the risk of death in children with underlying medical conditions by approximately 51% and in healthy children by 65%. The flu vaccine has been found to also reduce the risk of flu-associated hospitalizations among adults by approximately 40%.

Pregnant women who get the flu shot protect not only themselves, but their babies before and after birth, since the babies will carry the antibodies for several months after they are born. This is important because babies under six months old are too young to receive the vaccine.

In addition to the flu vaccine, DOH-Santa Rosa encourages everyone to practice these precautions to prevent the flu and flu-like illnesses:

- Wash hands frequently using soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover coughs and sneezes. Cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue and throw the tissue away after use, or cough or sneeze into your elbow or sleeve.
- Stay home if you are experiencing flu like symptoms and keep children with symptoms home from school or day care, until fever free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication, except to seek medical care.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

DOH-Santa Rosa offers flu shots by appointment at its clinics in Milton and Midway. Shots are offered at no fee for eligible children ages six months through 18 years through the Vaccines for Children Program. Adult vaccine is available at a fee of \$33.00 and is also covered by some insurances and Medicare for those who are eligible. To schedule an appointment, call 850-983-5200 and select Option 3.

For more information on the flu and flu vaccine, visit the Florida Department of Health Website at <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/prevention/flu-prevention/index.html> or the CDC Website at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>.

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