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FLU VACCINES ARE NOW AVAILABLE AT THE MONONGALIA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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You know that feeling. You have a fever, headaches, a runny nose and scratchy throat, your body aches and you are too fatigued to get out of bed. But those classic symptoms of influenza, which also can include vomiting and diarrhea—especially in children—can be avoided or lessened with a flu vaccine.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.gov) recommends that just about everyone over the age of 6 months, with a few exceptions, receive a flu vaccine. The Monongalia County Health Department has received its shipment of flu vaccines for the 2017-2018 season. You can get a vaccine at the health department or, if you have a workplace with at least 20 individuals who would be interested in the vaccine, we can come to you and perform an office clinic.

Those who want to get a vaccine can do so by appointment during the month of September. Flu vaccine clinics will be held on Fridays in October. Walk-ins are welcome, but appointments are still preferred. The health department is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. The cost of the vaccine is $25.

A yearly flu vaccine is important because protection can wane. Also, circulating flu strains can change from year to year. This year’s flu vaccine is a quadrivalent inoculation, which means that it protects against the four strains of influenza that health officials believe will be the most prevalent during the 2017-2018 flu season. Included in this year’s vaccine are two A strains, including H1N1, as well as two B strains.

The health department also has a “high dose” vaccine with more antigens to give a bigger boost to people ages 65 and older whose immune systems might have weakened over time.

You should get your flu shot by the end of October. That way, by the time Thanksgiving rolls around, you should be fully protected. It takes about two weeks for the antibodies that fight the flu to develop. Flu outbreaks are difficult to predict. They have happened as early as October and as late as May, although in West Virginia, it often peaks in February.

Children under the age of 6 months should not get the vaccine, so expectant mothers are encouraged to get it to pass on protection to their babies. Others who should not get the flu vaccine are people with severe, life-threatening allergies to flu vaccine or any ingredients in it, including gelatin or antibiotics. Some people with egg allergies can receive the flu vaccine, although not those who have experienced severe reactions in the past. The CDC has updated its guidelines and recommends that in some cases, those with egg allergies receive the vaccine from a health care provider who can manage allergic conditions.
Most people who get the flu recover in a week or two. However, the flu can cause complications, especially in senior citizens and people with other health conditions. Complications can include pneumonia and bronchitis. Some flu complications lead to death. The number of hospitalizations due to flu varies from season to season. In recent years, that number has been as low as 140,000 and as high as 710,000, according to the CDC.

It's also important to follow other measures to avoid flu. Be sure to wash your hands often, using soap and water. Avoid sick people; avoid touching your nose, eyes and mouth; and clean and disinfect areas that may be contaminated with germs. And if you do get sick, the CDC recommends staying home for at least 24 hours after your fever has gone away, other than to seek medical treatment.

For more information, to make an appointment or to schedule a clinic in your workplace, call the Monongalia County Health Department at 304-598-5119. Also, visit our website at www.monchd.org for more information about our programs.