

# Department of Health encourages communities to protect themselves against the flu – especially this season

Submitted by the Niagara County Department of Health

It's fall, and influenza (flu) season is here again. The flu is a respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. The virus spreads mainly from person to person through droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. The virus also may spread when people touch something with flu virus on it and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth. Flu can cause severe illness, hospitalization and death. Anyone can get the flu, and serious problems can occur at any age.

Along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the New York State Department of Health, the Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH) recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get the flu shot every year. According to the CDC, it is recommended to receive the flu shot by the end of October, but vaccination after that



will still provide protection for the duration of the flu season. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies that protect against flu to develop in the body.

The New York State Department of Health tracks influenza surveillance from October to the following May.

"For the second consecutive week, flu is widespread throughout the state, including Niagara County," Public Health Director Daniel J. Stapleton said. "We have seen a significant increase

in the number of laboratory-confirmed cases, and the number of people hospitalized statewide from last week."

The flu season in Australia, in the southern hemisphere, is ending; the country reported its worst flu

season in the past five years, and the season started earlier than usual. Seasonal influenza trends for countries in the northern hemisphere tend to follow what happens in the southern hemisphere.

There are many reasons to get a flu vaccine each year: Flu vaccination can keep you from getting sick; it has been shown to reduce the severity of illness in people who get vaccinated but still get sick; and flu vaccination can reduce the risk of flu-associated hospitalization.

Flu vaccination is an important preventive tool for people who are at higher risk for flu complications and hospitalization, including adults 65 years and older, children younger than 2 years old, pregnant women, people who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, and people with chronic medical conditions (asthma, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disorders, and disease that result in compromised immune systems).

In addition to self-protection, the flu vaccine adds a layer of protection for our community members who are most vulnerable to the flu. People who care for family members at home, people who spend time with pregnant women and infants, and people who work in child care settings, group homes, other congregate living settings, nursing homes, health care facilities and schools should make flu vaccination a priority.

"In addition to vaccination,

healthy behaviors to prevent the spread of the flu are also effective at prevention of other respiratory illnesses like COVID-19 and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus)," Stapleton said. "To help protect the health of our community, it is important to stay home when you are sick; wash your hands often; cover your mouth when sneezing or coughing; wear a mask when appropriate; and practice social distancing."

Flu shots are widely available in the community and may be administered at the same time as the coronavirus vaccine. To receive a flu shot, contact your local health care provider or pharmacy, visit the NCDOH COVID-19/flu vaccination schedule, or visit [www.vaccinefinder.org](http://www.vaccinefinder.org). For more information about influenza (flu) 2022-23 season, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2022-2023.htm>.

## NCDOH's sexual health clinic supports PrEP to prevent HIV

Submitted by the Niagara County Department of Health

PrEP Aware Week will take place Oct. 24-31, 2022. PrEP (HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis) is a powerful, safe and effective prevention tool to prevent getting HIV. In 2012, the Food and Drug Administration approved the first PrEP medication. Over the last 10 years, more than 70,000 New Yorkers have made the decision to use PrEP to prevent HIV.

PrEP helps keep individuals healthy with regular screening for HIV and STIs. When taken

consistently, PrEP reduces the risk of HIV by up to 99%. It is important to take the medicine as prescribed for it to be most effective. Many people taking PrEP report little to no side effects. People interested in PrEP work with a health care provider to determine how PrEP can be tailored to their individual needs and circumstances.

"Being empowered to take action to protect one's health is so important," said Daniel Stapleton, public health director. "The Niagara County Department of Health

nursing division team is devoted to providing seamless coordination of health services to our patients. We can easily refer people interested in PrEP to get started with our partners at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center infectious disease clinic."

If interested, call the Niagara County Department of Health nursing division at 716-278-1900 to help answer any questions.

People may also visit the Niagara County Department of Health's Sexual health clinic on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from

9 a.m. to 3 p.m. No appointment is necessary. Confidential testing, treatment and counseling is available for anyone 12 years of age and older.

Our clinic is a safe-zone, providing safe, welcoming, nonjudgmental care to all individuals.

Patients should bring insurance cards and be prepared to pay any copays due at the time of the visit. A clinic visit will cost no more than \$55, however, we will work with people if unable pay this amount. No one will be denied services based on their ability to pay.

Additional resources:

√ Niagara County Department of Health Nursing Division's Sexual Health Program, [https://www.niagaracounty.com/departments/m-r/nursing/sexual\\_health\\_center.php](https://www.niagaracounty.com/departments/m-r/nursing/sexual_health_center.php)

√ Basic PrEP Q&As, [www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/prep.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/prep.html)

√ New York State Department of Health, <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/general/prep/consumers.htm>

√ WNY End the Epidemic Initiative, <https://endhivwny.com/>

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