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Remaining vaccine reserved for high-risk individuals

Health Department Stressing Prevention as Flu Season Intensifies

With the country's supply of flu vaccine all but depleted, the Oak Park Department of Public Health is urging residents to think prevention until the threat of infection peaks in about mid-January.

"Manufacturers determine the quantity of flu vaccine to prepare months in advance of the season," said Oak Park Health Director Georgeen Polyak, PhD. "This year, it appears their calculations were not as accurate as we would have liked. The impact of this year's flu virus has been much greater than anyone anticipated. Our best approach now is to take steps to reduce the chances of infection."

Dr. Polyak said some vaccine is still available, but the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is recommending that the remaining doses be reserved for individuals most at risk. Those most at risk for severe complications from the flu include infants six to 23 months old, adults over 65 years old and individuals with serious, chronic illnesses.

Some doctors also may still have some doses of the nasal mist available. However, this vaccine is only for healthy persons ages five to 49.

In the meantime, Dr. Polyak said she is urging everyone to take precautions to slow the spread of the virus.

"A little soap and warm water can do wonders to prevent the spread of influenza," she said. "And those who are infected need to cover their mouths and noses when they sneeze and cough. Doctors also may be able to provide treatments that will ease the symptoms."

Polyak also said individuals who become ill with flu symptoms should stay home and not risk infecting others.

So far this year, Health department nurses have immunized more than 2,000 residents. About a dozen clinics have been held since October, offering residents easy access to low- and no-cost flu shots at locations such as senior citizen homes and the main Fire Department.

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