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by **Bethany Blitz**  
Page 1 of 1

## Lethal flu season hits Idaho hard

Flu kills, and this year in Idaho, it's particularly deadly.

There have been 47 influenza-related deaths in Idaho this season, more than in the past 17 seasons.

Thirteen of those deaths were in North Idaho. All the victims were 50 or older.

"This is one of the most severe flu seasons in the state since 2000," said Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, state influenza surveillance coordinator. "Unfortunately, this flu season is far from over."

Every year, according to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, influenza contributes to an estimated 36,000 deaths in the United States and over 200,000 hospitalizations.

The Idaho Bureau of Laboratories reports four different influenza viruses are circulating in Idaho this season. An overwhelming majority of those viruses, 98.4 percent of them, are the influenza A(H3) virus, which is considered the most severe of the influenza viruses detected.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said 97 percent of the flu viruses across the country this season match the strain that are in this season's vaccines.

"We're definitely still encouraging people to get vaccinated. It's not too late," said Melanie Collett, the public information officer for the Panhandle Health District. "The shot won't treat the flu, but it will prevent it or lessen the severity of it if you do get the flu."

Influenza isn't a reportable disease in Idaho, meaning local, state and national agencies don't require the flu to be reported when diagnosed, but the Panhandle Health District still does "active surveillance" of influenza in the community, Collett said.

She said the district works with doctors and schools to track the spread and severity of the flu each season.

Along with the vaccination, Collett said making sure to cover one's mouth when coughing or sneezing and washing one's hands can help prevent the flu, especially for people that work with the vulnerable populations; children, seniors and pregnant women. She added it's very important to stay home when sick so as not to spread the flu or other sicknesses.

If someone has the flu, Collett said seeking medical attention is best, especially if someone is part of a high-risk group. Doctors can provide antiviral medicine if they deem it necessary.

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