

Flu resurgence: 94 flu-related deaths in Idaho

Of 8 flu-related deaths last week, 7 were in the Treasure Valley

This year marks Idaho's deadliest flu season in several decades, following 94 flu-related deaths, according to Idaho's influenza surveillance coordinator. And Idaho's flu season is not over yet. The state's flu season runs from October to May, said Randi Pedersen, the state's influenza surveillance coordinator.

Eight people died from influenza just last week in Idaho. Seven of those deaths occurred in the Treasure Valley, according to Pedersen.

While flu season peaked in January and hit especially hard in the panhandle area of the state — 39 of the 94 deaths — last week was the deadliest week in the Treasure Valley for flu deaths, Pedersen said.

"Flu is peaking," Pedersen said. "Interesting thing now is it's centered in the Treasure Valley area."

Typically, Idaho sees most flu-related deaths during the peak season in January and February. Last year was the second most severe flu season Idaho had seen, with 72 flu-related deaths, but all of those deaths occurred before this time of year, Pedersen said.

"It's unusual," Pedersen said in regards to the resurgence of flu deaths so late in the season.

Of the 94 deaths in Idaho, only four occurred in people who were not over 50 years old. None of the four deaths occurred in people under 18 years old, according to an Idaho Influenza Surveillance Update report. All eight flu-death victims last week were over 50 years old, Pedersen said. Pedersen said there will not be one clear answer for the increase in flu-related deaths this year. But the department will be able to better understand why the flu deaths were worse this year with information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in June, which shares national statistics on how effective the vaccine was and by reviewing data from Idaho's flu season.

Factors for falling seriously ill to the flu include age, health, whether or not someone was vaccinated or the type of flu someone contracted, Pedersen said. Typically Influenza A hits in the early months, and Influenza B hits in the later months of flu season. It isn't known yet what type of influenza the eight people died from last week, she said. For Pedersen, she wants to make it clear that flu season is still circulating and can be serious.

It is still beneficial to get a flu shot late in the season if someone has not had the flu shot already, she said. For those who haven't or won't be vaccinated, Pedersen said there are still easy ways to protect yourself from the flu, such as staying away from sick people and washing hands. If you feel like you have serious flu symptoms, Pedersen said go to a doctor right away.

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