

## Flu season continues to be widespread throughout country

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**Clarification: Last week's article "Influenza potentially made stronger by vaccines" may have been misleading. The article's main source, Anna Treague, is not a nurse with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Treague, who was quoted, is a nurse with Burnett County Public Health. We regret the error and apologize for any confusion, inconvenience or misunderstanding it may have caused.**

The flu season has been in full swing for a few months. The seasonal disease has mutated over the years, and professionals say it has been made stronger as medicine continues to process vaccines.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(CDC) this season's flu is widespread in 49 states, Wisconsin and Minnesota are covered in high levels of the flu.

"I believe that the low effective rate of the vaccine this year is due to the mutations that the virus made in the processing of the vaccine itself," said Anna Treague, nurse for Public Health. "That is at least part of the reason that influenza cases are so widespread this year."

The flu or influenza is a seasonal contagious respiratory disease that is caused by influenza viruses. The CDC says the dominant strain this year is H3N2, which tends to be more severe and causes more severe symptoms than most other strains.

Treague said that symptoms include fever, chills, headache, dry cough and aching of muscles and joints. They usually appear 1 to 3 days after being infected with most people recovering within a week.

"The H3N2 strain also has proven to not be as impacted by the vaccines as other strains," Treague said.

That being said, Treague still suggests everyone should get a flu shot.

"If you are able, get the flu shot," Treague said. "Even if the flu vaccine isn't as effective as it has been in year's past it does help. Some protection is better than no protection."

A number of different influenza vaccines are produced every year. The most common uses a chicken egg to grow the virus, which is why people with an egg allergy need a special type of vaccine. Some vaccines are trivalent (containing 3 virus strains) or quadrivalent (containing 4 virus strains.)

Treague said the flu shot is a inactive/killed virus and the nasal spray from in alive, but weakened strain.

Typically production for the next year's flu shots are developed before the current season of the flu ended.

Treague explained that there are two main viruses associated with the flu, type A and type B. It spread through droplets of moisture that go from person to person when they sneeze, cough, or talk. Those droplets are then inhaled by another person and that is how it spreads.

“I think it is important that people know how serious influenza can be for certain people, especially those who are very young and the older population,” Treague said.

She said this is because at the beginning and end of one’s life their immune system is not as strong and their bodies have to work harder to fight off viruses and compensate for the symptoms of influenza.

“Fortunately, in Wisconsin to date there has been no influenza-associated pediatric deaths reported, whereas nationwide there have been 37,” Treague said.

Treague said anyone experiencing symptoms should see their doctor immediately so it can be caught in the early stages and treated with antiviral medication. She also stressed proper hand hygiene and covering one’s mouth when coughing is instrumental in not spreading the flu.

“Another thing to help avoid spreading influenza, if you are sick, stay home,” Treague said “Please take a break from daily errands and rest, don’t venture out unless needed, if you have to venture out wear a mask, to prevent the spreading of the virus through those moisture droplets.”