



KALAMAZOO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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Kalamazoo County Healthcare Partners Urge Residents to Get a Flu Vaccine

KALAMAZOO, MI—Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department and healthcare partners Ascension Borgess, Bronson Healthcare, Family Health Center, and WMed Health urges residents to get vaccinated against the flu to protect themselves and their loved ones from the influenza virus. As the coronavirus pandemic continues to affect Kalamazoo County communities, getting the flu vaccine is one of the best ways to reduce respiratory illness circulating in the area.

Every person six months and older should get an annual flu vaccine, especially certain groups considered at the highest risk, like young children, pregnant women, adults who have chronic health conditions, or adults over the age of fifty.

Influenza is a serious respiratory illness that occurs seasonally nationwide. The flu season typically starts in October and can last as late as May. The flu shot takes approximately two weeks to provide full protection against the influenza virus. It is recommended that residents receive their vaccine before the holiday season begins. Getting a flu vaccine this fall can reduce your risk of getting the flu and help save scarce medical resources needed to care for people with COVID-19.

"With COVID-19 still spreading, getting the flu shot is more important than ever to stay healthy. The influenza vaccine is a safe and effective way to reduce illness, school or work absences, hospital stays, and death due to the flu. The more people are protected from the flu, the more hospital beds and testing supplies can be available during the COVID-19 pandemic. This further protects yourself, your family, and your community," states Dr. William Nettleton, Medical Director for Kalamazoo County.

The five healthcare partners are launching a Flu Vaccine Campaign in hopes of reaching a 33% increase in the number of people getting the vaccine in Kalamazoo County, a goal that is in alignment with the State of Michigan. As part of that campaign, Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department will add a flu vaccine tracker to the Kalamazoo County Data Hub. Residents will be able to track both the number of flu vaccines given out during this flu season and the coverage rate in comparison to the last flu season.

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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“In recent years, Kalamazoo County has seen a decline in flu vaccinations, especially in the age groups of 18-24 year olds and 50-64 year olds,” said Mary Franks, Epidemiologist at the Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department. “Our best line of defense against the spread of flu in our community is for people to get the flu vaccine. In creating the flu vaccine tracker, we are hopeful the data will encourage people to get vaccinated while all of us work together towards a common goal of creating a healthy Kalamazoo County.”

Anyone can get the flu, including healthy children and adults. Symptoms of influenza, which are similar to COVID-19 symptoms, include fever or feeling feverish/chilled, body aches, cough, sore throat, or fatigue. While preventive actions recommended to reduce the risk of COVID-19 such as wearing a face covering and social distancing may also help to reduce the risk of flu transmission, it is important to get the flu vaccine, which is the most effective way to prevent the virus altogether.

If you receive a vaccination and still get the flu, the vaccine may make flu symptoms milder and the length of illness shorter. The vaccine will also prevent you from spreading the flu to others, including those at risk of more serious illness. Additionally, these simple steps can help stop the spread of flu or other germs and help protect you from getting sick:

- Stay home when you are sick, which will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean your hands often, with soap and water or hand sanitizer.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

There are many locations where residents can receive a flu vaccine, including area pharmacies and through their family doctor’s office. The Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department offers flu vaccinations by appointment only Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Most insurance plans will cover these vaccines' cost, but no one will be turned away from the health department for an inability to pay.

For questions regarding the influenza vaccine or to find vaccine locations in the community, visit www.kalcounty.com/hcs/flu vaccine/. To schedule an appointment at the health department, contact the Health & Community Services Department at 269-373-5203.

For further information, visit CDC’s webpage at www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/keyfacts.htm.

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