



**Experts urge flu shots  
for everyone**  
**(**

Jennifer Stahl injects Melissa Miller with flu vaccine at MedExpress Urgent Care in Richland Township on Friday. Todd Berkey

**democrat.com/local/x587176243/Experts-urge-flu-shots-for-everyone)**

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— Last year at this time the much-discussed H1N1 influenza virus was beginning its second surge across the region, even as the government and local health-care providers were still scrambling to get enough vaccine.

There is no such early outbreak this year, and experts don't expect anything but a normal flu season.

Likewise, there has been no delays in vaccine shipments, and an ample supply is expected, state Health Department spokeswoman Holly Senior said.

"Things will be a lot different this year than last year," Senior said. "We do not anticipate there will be any shortages."

In fact, many pharmacy chains and other private providers have already started their flu shot clinics. That includes MedExpress Urgent Care, which opened recently in the Richland Plaza, 1221 Scalp Ave.

"We have had interest from the community," Dr. Kevin Grosso said at MedExpress. "The (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) reports it is possible to come into contact with seasonal influenza as early as October."

There is no need to worry about getting a flu shot too early and having it wear out before the season passes.

"They are good for the duration of the flu season," said Dr. Louis Schenfeld, an infectious disease specialist with Memorial Medical Center in Johnstown.

As recently as 2005, doctors advised patients to wait until mid-October or later because it was felt vaccine would wear out in six months.

"We used to think that, but that has changed," Schenfeld said. "Vaccine isn't good for a finite period."

Another change this year is an expanded campaign to get vaccine to everybody and not concentrate on high-risk populations, Schenfeld said.

"Anybody and everybody should get a flu shot," Schenfeld said. "We used to say, 'over this age,' but now it's: Anybody who doesn't want to be sick or give the flu to their family and coworkers."

A record 171 million doses of flu vaccine are expected, Senior said. This year's vaccine covers one strain of Type B influenza and two strains of Type A influenza, including the H1N1 Type A that swept across the nation last year.

The CDC director believes increased attention to the flu last year should carry over and prompt more people to get vaccine this year, CDC Director Dr. Thomas R. Frieden said.

"I think I'm more optimistic, and I think last year will be a plus rather than a minus, in terms of vaccine coverage," Frieden said. "More people got vaccinated – more pregnant women got vaccinated – than ever before last year. People understand flu more."

Last year, the flu arrived early and was more severe in some unusual populations: Pregnant women, school-age children and young adults.

While this year's season is expected to be more normal, Schenfeld stresses that influenza can

always be a serious illness.

Otherwise healthy adults and children will lose a week of work or school, knocked down by fever, aches, cough, respiratory symptoms and fatigue. Senior citizens, very young children and those with underlying health issues face more complications. An average of 36,000 people die every year, directly or indirectly, from influenza.

“The vaccine prevents all that,” Schenfeld said.

It is even more crucial for health-care workers to get flu shots, Frieden said. Not only are they more likely to come into contact with flu patients, but they can infect other, already compromised, patients.

“I believe that health-care workers should be vaccinated unless they have an egg allergy or a religious reason not to be vaccinated,” Frieden said. “Studies have long shown pretty definitively that, at least in nursing homes, if the health-care workers get vaccinated, their patients are much less likely to get sick and to die from flu during flu season.”

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