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Flu increasing nationally, but not in Oregon ***Weekly influenza update for Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2010***

Influenza disease activity increased nationally during the week of Dec. 20-26, after eight consecutive weeks of decline. Of the 10 U.S. "regions" though, Oregon's is one of only two where current activity is considered "normal" instead of "elevated" for this time of year.

"January is often when seasonal flu spreads, but we know that a record number of people have already received a seasonal flu shot. H1N1 vaccination is the best way to keep flu activity from increasing in Oregon," says Mel Kohn, M.D., M.P.H., Oregon Public Health director.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the national percentage of people who visited the doctor for influenza-like illness increased during the week of Dec. 20-26, possibly because fewer people schedule routine doctor visits during the holidays. Overall hospitalization rates remained unchanged from the previous week but the proportion of deaths attributed to influenza increased.

Since September 1, 2009, in Oregon 1,303 people have been hospitalized from the flu and 63 people have died.

"Flu illness is holding steady in Oregon. The likelihood of flu activity remaining steady increases as more people get vaccinated against H1N1 flu," says Kohn.
(more)

Kohn says January is a good time to get an H1N1 vaccine to help prevent increased flu activity in Oregon this winter and spring. "It's also a great time for smokers to quit smoking, which will decrease their chances of complications from the flu or any illness," he says.

For more information, visit www.flu.oregon.gov. Beginning Jan. 16, the Oregon Public Health Flu Hotline (800-978-3040) will change its hours to 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. – noon weekends and holidays.

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