



## NEWS RELEASE

October 6, 2023

## CONTACT

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Media only: (406) 791-2063

### Influenza Death; RSV Immunization Update

*Great Falls, MT* – We regret to announce the death of a Cascade County resident from influenza. The individual was under the age of 50. *Attached to this release is a Montana Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS) release issued yesterday.*

Between 2018-2022, 14 Cascade County residents passed away due to influenza infection. The death in Cascade County last week was Montana's first during the 2023-2024 respiratory illness season. 18 influenza infections, 3 of which required hospitalization, have been confirmed in Cascade County over the past 4 weeks.

CCHD encourages all residents to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer regularly and stay home when sick to limit spread. Immunization remains the best form of protection against serious outcomes of respiratory illnesses, such as hospitalization or death due to infection. Immunizations for flu and COVID-19 (while supplies remain) are available at CCHD by appointment, and walk-in clinics will be held throughout October:

**Friday, October 6**, 2pm-5pm, at Great Falls Fire Rescue (GFFR) Training Center, 1900 9th St S, Great Falls

**Friday, October 13**, 2pm-5pm, at GFFR Station 2, 731 6th St NW, Great Falls

**Wednesday, October 18**, 10am-4pm, at Great Falls Public Library, 301 2nd Ave N, Great Falls

**Friday, October 20**, 2pm-5pm, at GFFR Training Center, 1900 9th St S, Great Falls

**Friday, October 27**, 2pm-5pm, at GFFR Station 4, 1800 Fox Farm Rd, Great Falls

In addition, immunization for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is now available by appointment at CCHD. During the 2022-2023 season, there were 456 confirmed RSV cases in Cascade County. Immunization is available, while supplies remain, for the following eligibility groups:

Adults age 60 and older;

Women who are 32-36 weeks pregnant (immunization provides protection against severe RSV illness in the recipient's baby for up to 6 months after birth);

Newborns and babies under 1 year of age and born during or entering their first RSV season; and

Children up to 24 months who remain at risk of severe RSV disease through their second RSV season.

Please call 406-454-6950 to schedule an appointment or for more information.

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For media opportunities, please call Ben Spencer: (406) 791-2063

If you are a member of the public, please call: (406) 454-6950



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 5, 2023

Contact: Jon Ebelt, Communications Director, DPHHS, (406) 444-0936

## DPHHS Encourages Montanans to Prepare for Respiratory Illness this Fall, Winter

### First influenza death reported for 2023-24 season

As Montana gears up to enter another respiratory illness season, the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) encourages Montanans to take precautions to help protect against severe symptoms from COVID-19, influenza, pneumococcal pneumonia, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infections.

The number of people ill due to respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, influenza, pneumococcal pneumonia, and RSV, is currently low across most of the United States, but has increased in recent weeks.

Montana has already begun seeing laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza and DPHHS is reporting the first influenza death of the 2023-2024 season. The individual, an adult who died last week, was a resident of Cascade County.

Health officials say this is early in the season to report an influenza death as Montana has historically reported deaths due to influenza beginning in November.

Vaccination remains the best form of protection against serious outcomes of these diseases, such as hospitalization or death due to infection. Older adults, infants, and persons with weakened immune systems and other chronic conditions (e.g., diabetes, heart disease) are at greatest risk for hospitalization and death due to infection, but healthy children and adults can still experience severe disease.

Vaccines are available for COVID-19, influenza, pneumococcal pneumonia, and RSV. To find vaccine locations, visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov), or contact your local health department or health care provider.

- Updated COVID-19 vaccines are available for Montanans ages six months and older.
- Several flu vaccines are available for Montanans ages 6 months and older. One dose offers protection for the full season (October – June).



- Pneumococcal vaccines help protect against a deadly form of bacterial pneumonia, which is the most serious form of pneumococcal disease. Older persons and those with chronic conditions (e.g., diabetes, existing lung disease) are at higher risk for contracting this disease and experiencing serious health outcomes.
- Adults 60 years and older are eligible to receive RSV vaccines after discussion with their health care provider.
- Infants and young children under 24 months old may be eligible to receive a monoclonal antibody product that offers protection from severe RSV infection.

Montanans are encouraged to consult with a health care provider to determine their recommended vaccine options heading into this respiratory season.

In addition to vaccination, Montanans can take everyday precautions to help stop the spread of respiratory illness. Those precautions include:

- Stay home if you are experiencing symptoms of a respiratory illness. If you have a fever, stay home for at least 24 hours until after the fever is gone without the use of fever reducing medication, unless you need to seek medical care.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol in it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Cover your mouth with your inner elbow or a disposable tissue anytime you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid contact with people experiencing symptoms of a respiratory illness.

Symptoms of COVID-19, flu, RSV, and other respiratory illnesses are similar and may include a fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headache, body aches, and low energy. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, consult with your medical provider. Your provider may recommend that you get tested to confirm a diagnosis. Antiviral medications are available for certain individuals with influenza or COVID-19 infections.

Anyone experiencing symptoms such as trouble breathing, shortness of breath, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new onset of confusion or disorientation, inability to stay awake, or other severe or concerning symptoms should seek immediate medical evaluation.

This month, DPHHS will release a new dashboard to keep the public informed of COVID-19, influenza, and RSV activity in Montana.