

Outwit The Flu Article from: WebMD

The flu is hitting the nation harder than it did at this time last year, but it could be peaking in some parts of the country, the CDC said today.

CDC Director Thomas Frieden, MD, MPH, said Americans who haven't yet been vaccinated against the flu should do so.

"Better late than never," Frieden said at a news conference today.

And the unvaccinated might want to get their dose sooner rather than later. The CDC said that flu vaccine makers were expected to supply the U.S. with about 135 million doses. As of Jan. 4, roughly 128 million doses had been distributed.

Given reports of spot shortages, people who want to get the vaccine may have to call more than one doctor or clinic.

Flu Shot Not Perfect

The current flu vaccine is 62% effective, which means that 38% of Americans who get vaccinated could still get the flu.

"The flu vaccine is far from perfect, but it is the best tool by far for preventing the flu," he said. "It's well worth the effort."

Joseph Bresee, MD, who heads the epidemiology and prevention branch of the CDC's influenza division, said the vaccine effectiveness rate of 62% is similar to previous years.

Patients with flu-like symptoms have flooded hospital emergency rooms in the Northeast. The mayor of Boston declared a public health emergency on Jan 9.

Flu Spreads across U.S.

The CDC's weekly report of flu activity for the week ending Jan. 5 shows that 47 states reported widespread flu activity, six more than the week before.

Another key measure of flu, the proportion of outpatient visits for flu-like illness, tells a different story. The rate at the end of the first week of 2013 stood at 4.3%, down from the 5.6% posted for the week before. The number of states reporting high levels of visits decreased from 29 to 24.

Frieden said this decrease in outpatient visits may suggest that flu is peaking or waning in some states. But because the holidays can affect these rates, it will take a few more weeks to confirm the trend.

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