

Flu fighters

Proper precautions
can help prevent
spread of illness

BY MARGARET HOBBS
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(McMinnville, Tennessee)

With the flu existing in all 50 states, it makes one wonder how to prevent it, short of staying in and not venturing outdoors. With most of us, that's not a reasonable option, since work, school and responsibilities put us in the public.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more people sought care for flulike illnesses than at any comparable period in nearly a decade. Its most recent report, ending Feb. 2, shows 16 children dying, bringing the total of flu-related deaths this flu season to 53.

Warren County Schools health service director Sonja Walker feels social distancing is a good thing, and the snow days where children were not in school were probably beneficial.

"I track and trend the attendance numbers, and if the school nurses see a trend, I check it to get an accurate account of illness," said Walker. "They are great about letting me know, and there has not been an upward trend of absences due to flu or illness."

Dibrell School nurse M'Liss Miller said they have been very fortunate, as there was not much sickness at Dibrell.

"In general, the biggest thing we can do is stay home if you have a fever or stomach issues," said Miller. "It's best to not be around people if you are experiencing nausea, vomiting or have a fever."

On the other hand, West Elementary is reporting close to 50 absentees per day, up from approximately 25 per day.

"We are getting some calls from parents reporting positive results for the flu," said West nurse Brittany McGee. "I have seen some children with fevers and not feeling well, and I'm sure there are cases that have not been diagnosed."

According to Whitney Blankenship FNP-C with Family Care Clinic the state of Tennessee is experiencing a severe flu season, and says the clinic has treated several flu patients since Christmas.

"They tell us the statewide ERs are overwhelmed right now, and it is advised to use walk-in clinics or call your doctor if you become ill," said Blankenship.

This strain of flu is quite severe, and is always harder on the very young and the older patients. It is recommended to still get a flu shot, but remember it can take up to two weeks for the body to build immunity.

Blankenship says getting the vaccination can increase the odds that the symptoms will not be as severe, and will not last as long. She encourages everyone to stay home when sick, and do not take sick children to schools or daycares. Frequent hand washing with soap is key to germ control, as well as practicing cough control, and keeping hands away from the eyes and face.

"We can administer the easy nasal swab that will tell us 100 percent if you have the flu," said Blankenship. "If you do get the flu, it typically lasts 7-10 days, but when caught early can be treated with Tamiflu to shorten the illness." The clinic can be reached by calling 931-474-4700.

Usual flu symptoms

(may vary)

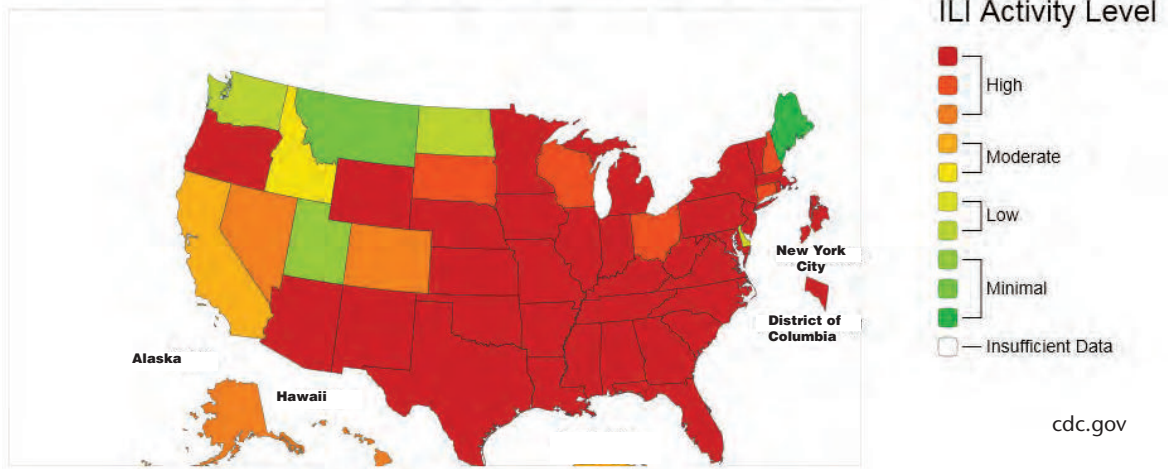
- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Vomiting and diarrhea are more common in children than adults



Reyes Acuna, 8, washes his hands with soap and water in an effort to kill germs. He has already experienced a bout with the flu and doesn't want to take a chance of getting it again.

Margaret Hobbs photos

2017-2018 Influenza Season Week 4 ending Jan. 27



cdc.gov



Family nurse practitioner Julie Carr of Family Care Clinic gives a well check to 4-year-old patient Abby Blankenship. Carr advises everyone to still get the flu shot because the illness is widespread and may last longer than usual.



West Elementary school nurse Brittany McGee takes the temperature of student Daniel Murrillo. She encourages parents to keep their children home if they are experiencing a fever or stomach problems.