By Carolyn Lee
The Imperial Republican

If you have a fever, stay home. If you have flu symptoms, stay home. And, it's not too late to get an influenza vaccination.

Those are the three most-often repeated statements from health care providers in the Imperial area. Many cases of influenza are being reported and laboratory-confirmed.

Myra Stoney, director of the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) said the number of school, hospital and laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza are all up in the eight-county area (Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Perkins and Red Willow).

She said, "If you have a fever, stay home." Stoney repeated that instruction to those who have taken a fever reducing medication.

A person should stay away from work or school until they have been fever-free for 24 hours, she stated.

Rhonda Sargent of the Chase County Clinic said patients with influenza, and reports of cases, started before Christmas and are still being seen at the clinic.

"We're still having positives on A and B" flu, she said, although numbers aren't available.

At Chase County Community Hospital, Patient Safety Coordinator Angella Herbert said that as of Jan. 14 there have been 25 A and seven B flu strain cases that are laboratory confirmed.

Two or three persons have been admitted to the hospital for influenza.

Chase County Schools Nurse Angie Paisley said close to 15 cases of flu have been reported in grades K-12, with a few teachers also sick.

Imperial Manor Nursing Home Director of Nursing Tammy Simpson said none of the residents or staff have had the flu. She noted that most residents and employees received the flu vaccine shots.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that at least 40 states are currently dealing with a moderate to serious flu outbreak.

Doctors suggest that calling in sick if you happen to have flu-like symptoms is the best way to help prevent the spread of this year's particularly aggressive national flu outbreak.

"Even with the flu-like symptoms, many people still try to go to work, school or other activities," according to Dr. Andrew Sama, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians.

"This is only making a bad situation worse, spreading the virus and getting more people sick. Not to mention, you are putting yourself at greater risk of worsening your current health situation such as developing pneumonia."

Paisley said people should remain home until they are fever-free. That means your temperature should be under 100 without the use of a fever-reducing medicine. The cough should also be gone, Paisley noted.

Typical symptoms include fever, sore throat, runny nose and upper respiratory symptoms, headache, fatigue and muscle or body aches. To get over it quickly, doctors advise that you drink plenty of liquids, get rest and if diagnosed early take antiviral medication.

Those at highest risk of flu include the elderly, pregnant women and people with special medical needs.

Seek help

Adults should seek emergency medical care if they are experiencing any of the following:

Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath; pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen; sudden

dizziness; confusion, or severe or persistent vomiting.

Medical care for children should be sought for:

Fast breathing or trouble breathing; bluish skin color; not drinking enough fluids; not waking up or not interacting; being so irritable that the child does not want to be held, or fever with a rash.

An infant who has any of the following symptoms should get emergency care:

Irritability/being inconsolable; inability to eat or drink; trouble breathing; no tears when crying; significantly fewer wet diapers than normal, and persistent fevers.

The American Red Cross notes that kids have a way of picking up colds and other illnesses. It cautions parents to teach children proper hand washing techniques and how to correctly cover coughs or sneezes.

Washing hands properly is an important step to avoid getting the flu. Wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, covering the entire hand including fingernails and under jewelry.

Rinse and dry thoroughly with a disposable towel. Use the towel to turn off the faucet.

If using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, rub thoroughly over the entire hand, including nail areas and between the fingers. Continue to rub until the product dries.

Vaccinations

It's not too late to get the flu vaccine if you haven't done so already. Stoney said SWNPHD "had plenty on hand last week. We've seen a lot of activity in the last week. I encourage people to get the vaccine."

Her office is out of the under age 18 vaccine, but will be receiving more this week. She said she has not seen a shortage of any type of vaccine in her district.

Sargent said the Chase County Clinic doesn't have any of the age 2-18 vaccine. There is a supply of the adult vaccine, and Sargent said that will be given out until the clinic runs out.

She suggests calling before visiting the clinic to get a shot. The vaccination is billed to insurance or costs $25 for a patient pay service.