

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

It's a little bit late this year, but the influenza season has hit Chase County. A number of people have been hospitalized, and Chase County Community Hospital (CCCH) and Chase County Clinic are keeping track of confirmed cases.

Chief of Staff Dr. Jonathan Richman said Monday that eight cases of Influenza A had been seen, and 10 Influenza B cases. Four more cases were reported Monday. The letters "A" and "B" reflect the strain of flu.

Chase County Schools Nurse Angie Paisley said she is guessing that there have been 40 documented cases reported by students and staff at the school.

"We've had quite a few cases in both the elementary and high school," she commented.

Reports started being received last week, she said, with more already this week.

The flu, called influenza, infects the nose, throat and lungs. It is caused by a virus and may produce weariness, stuffy or drippy nose, aches, sore throat and cough, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

The stomach flu, in which vomiting or diarrhea occurs, is caused by other viruses and typically isn't attributable to influenza.

Dr. Tom Safranek, Nebraska's state epidemiologist, said the flu typically peaks in late January. He noted that it is peaking later than usual this year.

Dr. Richman said the season is "a little bit late. We started seeing our first ones (cases) the first of March." He added that the number of cases isn't unusual or heavy.

"We haven't seen any one who had the immunization shot who got influenza," he stated.

Dr. Richman said the flu shot should be effective for a year, according to the CDC. There is no reason to get one now, he added, as it takes a couple of weeks to build up an immunity to the flu.

Most flu shots are administered in late fall and early winter.

The good news was that the flu vaccine matched some of the strains of flu going around. Every year the mix changes, according to CCCH Administrator Lola Jones.

Prescription antiviral medications need to be taken within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms to shorten and reduce the severity of the flu, according to Dr. Gary Gorby, chief of adult infectious diseases at Creighton University's School of Medicine. While most people treat their flu with over-the-counter medication, Dr. Gorby said it's wise to see a doctor.

Persons most vulnerable to being seriously harmed by the flu include those over 65 years, those who suffer lung or heart disease, or those who have diabetes, kidney failure or other chronic diseases.

Perkins County Schools

Perkins County Schools in Grant has reported an extremely high absenteeism due to influenza.

According to the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SNPHD), which conducts a weekly surveillance in the area, 36 out of 117 students were absent Monday due to diagnosed influenza or influenza-like symptoms.

Persons who are ill should stay home until four to five days after the symptoms start, Myra Stoney of SNPHD said.

Tips for helping those sick with the flu include:

Have them drink a lot of juice or water;

Keep the sick person comfortable, as rest is important;

Use ibuprofen (Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) for fever, sore throat and muscle aches. Do not use aspirin with children or teenagers, as it can cause Reye's syndrome, a life-threatening illness;

Keep tissues and a trash bag within reach of the sick person. Instruct them to cough only into their sleeve or another article of clothing, not the hand;

Wash hands frequently;

Keep the sick person away from well persons.