

LOCALNEWS

Flu facts: Virus considered widespread in Minnesota

Local health official says it’s not too late to get vaccinated

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

Cover your mouth and wash your hands – the flu is here.

The Minnesota Department of Health says influenza is now considered “widespread” throughout Minnesota, and a local health official said that includes Borderland.

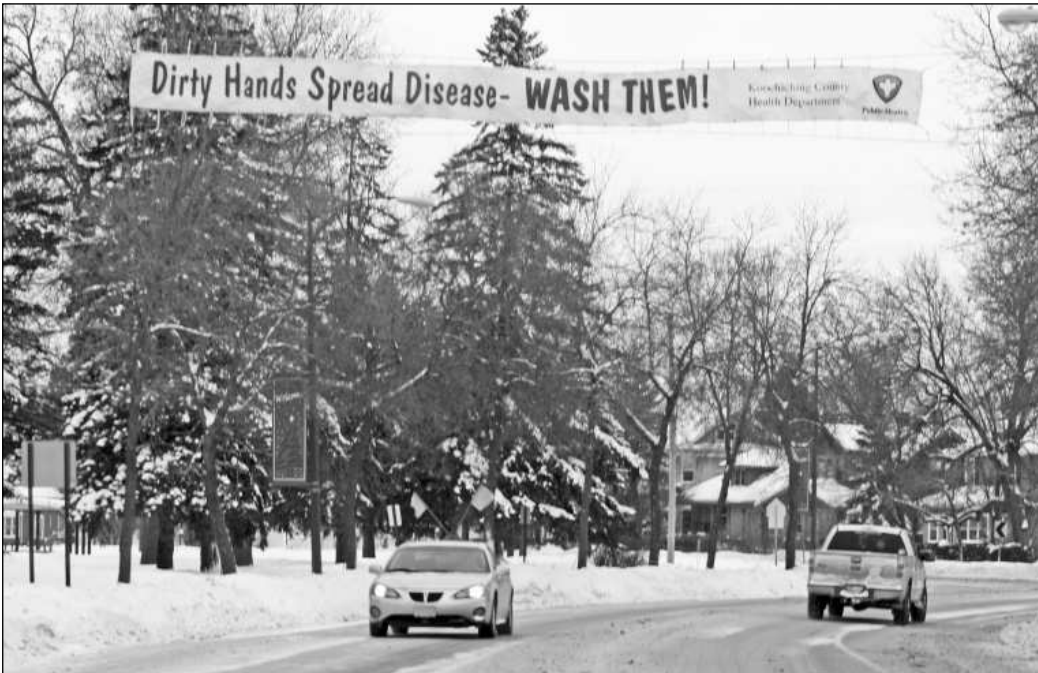
“Koochiching County has influenza cases similar to the rest of the state,” said Koochiching County Health Department Director Susan Congrave.

As of the last week of 2013, the Minnesota Department of Health reported 71 influenza-related hospitalizations for a total of 189 since the flu season began. Congrave said she wasn’t aware of any local hospitalizations.

Statewide, there have been no influenza-related deaths identified in people age 18 or younger and the most commonly identified strain of flu in the state has been influenza A or H1N1, stated the health department’s report. This season’s cases of people hospitalized for influenza is fewer than the 382 hospitalized for the same time period in the 2012-2013 season, continued the report.

However, influenza activity continues to increase and people should, if they haven’t already, get vaccinated, Congrave said.

“Everyone over 6 months



A Koochiching County Health Department banner hanging over Third Street reminds people to keep their hands washed during flu season.

of age would benefit from being vaccinated if they do not have any contraindications in receiving the vaccine,” she said. “It is not too late to be vaccinated.”

This year, the county Health Department has administered more than 800 flu vaccines, Congrave said, adding she thought Rainy Lake Medical Center did about the same through its community clinics.

“Flu vaccine is the best protection we have from the flu and its complications,” she said. “It is also the best way to prevent spreading the flu from person to person.”

The flu season can fluctuate, but Congrave said it typically runs between October and May. People most at risk for contracting the virus are young children, pregnant women, people over 65 years of age, and people with certain health

conditions such as heart, lung, or kidney disease and people with weakened immune systems.

“The flu vaccine is especially important for these people,” Congrave said, adding by getting vaccinated people are not just protecting themselves, but also those who are in close contact with them.

A common misconception about the vaccine is that those who receive it get the flu. Congrave said that is not the case.

“Some people get mild flu-like symptoms for a short time after being vaccinated, but this is a sign that your body is responding to the vaccine,” she said. “It is not the flu...because there are many cold viruses circulating in the fall, it is possible that a person could be infected and become ill at the same time they receive the flu vaccine.”

COMING DOWN WITH THE FLU

The flu isn’t often dangerous. But it can be.

Congrave said those who have the flu should stay home, rest and keep hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids.

“Avoid crowds and wash your hands frequently, especially if you have been in contact with lots of people,” she said of preventative measures to take against getting the flu. “Avoid shaking hands, or sharing food and drinking utensils. Stay away from people if they are sick, it protects both of you. Cover your cough and sneezes but not in your hand – use your sleeve or Kleenex.”

Vaccinations are available at Koochiching County Health Department clinics from noon to 4 p.m. Thursdays on the second floor of the Forestland Annex building.

History event to gather memories

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Each generation of International Falls residents has had its favorite dining spots, from the Chicago Café to Sandy’s. On Thursday, area residents are invited to gather and share memories about local eateries at the first History Café, an initiative of the recently formed “AGE to age” program of International Falls.

“This is our first attempt at gathering together different generations and learning from each other about our community’s past,” said Rachel Amdahl, coordinator of the local AGE to age program. “Our goal is to eventually publish a history trail guide for visitors and community members. We decided to start by collecting people’s favorite memories of buildings, businesses, and activities.”

The history trail project is the second initiative of the AGE to age program in the Falls. Last summer the program launched the community garden located on Third Street near the International Falls Public Library.

“AGE to age: bringing the generations together” is the newest member of the “KIDS PLUS” family of activities of the Northland Foundation. Launched in the fall of 2008, AGE to age enables elders, adults, and youth to explore how their generations are both alike and different.

Each AGE to age community develops an action plan that joins generations in projects to improve their community. Ten AGE to age sites were established between 2008 and 2012. By 2013, Aitkin, International Falls, and Two Harbors had joined this intergenerational initiative.

Northland Foundation staff facilitated meetings in International Falls in 2013. Through brainstorming activities, participants created a vision statement and two major initiatives were identified, a community garden and a guided history trail.

The first history trail event, the History Café, will be held at a present-day restaurant, the Coffee Landing Café at 444 Third Street.

Those who attend the History Café will be asked to gather in small groups to talk about dining establishments important to them and then to share their observations with the larger group. Participants are encouraged to bring photos of their favorite eatery.

The event begins at 5:30. Amdahl explained that there will be soup and sandwiches as long as they last.

“We hope to see members of many generations, share a good time and learn from each other,” Amdahl said. Those with questions can call Community Education at 283-2571, ext 186.



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