

Health care officials advocate flu shots, healthy living

By Jen Reeder
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WELD COUNTY – The colder weather is a sign that it’s time for dusting off the skis, drinking hot chocolate and gearing up for the holidays. But it’s also the time when flu season approaches, and local health care institutions are offering flu shots to help residents ward off the sickness.

“In order to keep everyone healthy, we want to vaccinate everybody,” said Dr. Nicky Theiss, a family physician at Carbon Valley Medical Center in Firestone. “Influenza is a very mean respiratory virus.”

Each year, scientists examine viruses circulating worldwide and develop a vaccine in anticipation of several strands of the influenza virus. Because the virus mutates quickly, a new vaccine is developed each year. Last year’s flu season was particularly nasty because only one of the vaccines for four strands proved effective.

“Last year, they didn’t guess so well,” Theiss said.

Still, it is important for children – “they’re small and their immune systems are not as strong” – and seniors to get a flu shot, as well as people with lung disease, diabetes and heart disease, she said. The medical center held a flu shot open house Nov. 1, with \$25 vaccinations (with or without insurance). Shots are also available on a walk-in basis for adults over

18. Theiss said it is a myth that the flu shot can cause the flu.

“It’s proteins that look like the flu so the body will recognize the protein,” she said. “In the first 24 hours after any vaccine, you can feel a little punk because your body is churning out an immune response.”

After the shot, it takes up to two weeks for the body to mount an immune response to influenza, she said. Sometimes when people get sick after having a flu shot, they catch a cold and confuse it with the flu.

“It’s hard to tell them apart initially, but the flu is much more severe,” she said.

Initial symptoms include a cough, sore throat and aches. Within 24 hours of contracting the flu, a person will typically develop a fever over 101 degrees, with increased muscle pain, weakness and fatigue, she said.

“If you think you have the flu, it’s important to come in within 48 hours, because anti-viral medication can help shorten the length and severity of symptoms,” Theiss said.

Margaret Huffman, a public health nurse consultant with the Colorado Department of Health and Environment, said it is important not just for the primary people who need flu shots to get them, but also for people who come into contact with them.

“I want to have a vaccination

to protect my grandparents,” she said.

More than 3,600 people die of the flu each year in America, and over 2,000 are hospitalized from complications of the virus, according to Huffman.

“That’s a huge cost for a vaccine-preventable illness,” she said. “The most important three things are to wash your hands, cough into your sleeve and receive the flu vaccine.”

She said it is important to get the flu shot before the holidays because the people who travel to areas that may be experiencing an outbreak can easily spread it to other parts of the country.

Linda Mundorff, a traditional naturopath with a private practice in Frederick and author of “Take Control: A Guide to Holistic Living,” said people considering getting a flu shot should be proactive in their health care and educate themselves when making decisions about vaccinations.

However, the elderly should not take chances and be sure to get a flu shot, she said.

“A lot of elderly people die from pneumonia, and that could have been a side effect of the flu,” she said. “My dad is 88, and I have him take a flu shot every year.”

Still, she had an adverse reaction over 20 years ago to a flu shot she had when working as a registered nurse in Denver and has never had one again. Instead, she’s stayed flu-free over the years by healthy living, she said.

“The bottom line is that most of us are walking around with immune systems that are not functioning properly,” she said. “People want a quick fix. It’s not going to happen.”

The keys to staying healthy include good nutrition, exercise, hand washing and rest, she said.

“Sleep is so important. I spend so much money on my beds,” she said. “If you don’t sleep well, the body never goes into its maintenance mode. That’s when everything is getting repaired – the immune system is regenerating itself. Sometimes it’s as simple as getting a better pillow or mattress.”

For people who do decide to get a flu shot, there will be plenty to go around.

“There is ample vaccine this year, so anyone who wants to avoid the illness should get the influenza vaccination,” Huffman said.

Residents interested in receiving the flu vaccine can go to Salud Family Health Center in Firestone every Friday in November from 1 p.m. – 4 p.m. for \$10 shots during flu clinics. Adults over the age of 18 can walk in to the Carbon Valley Medical Center for \$25 shots. More information on flu shot locations and influenza prevention is online at www.immunizecolorado.com.

Time to read in Mead

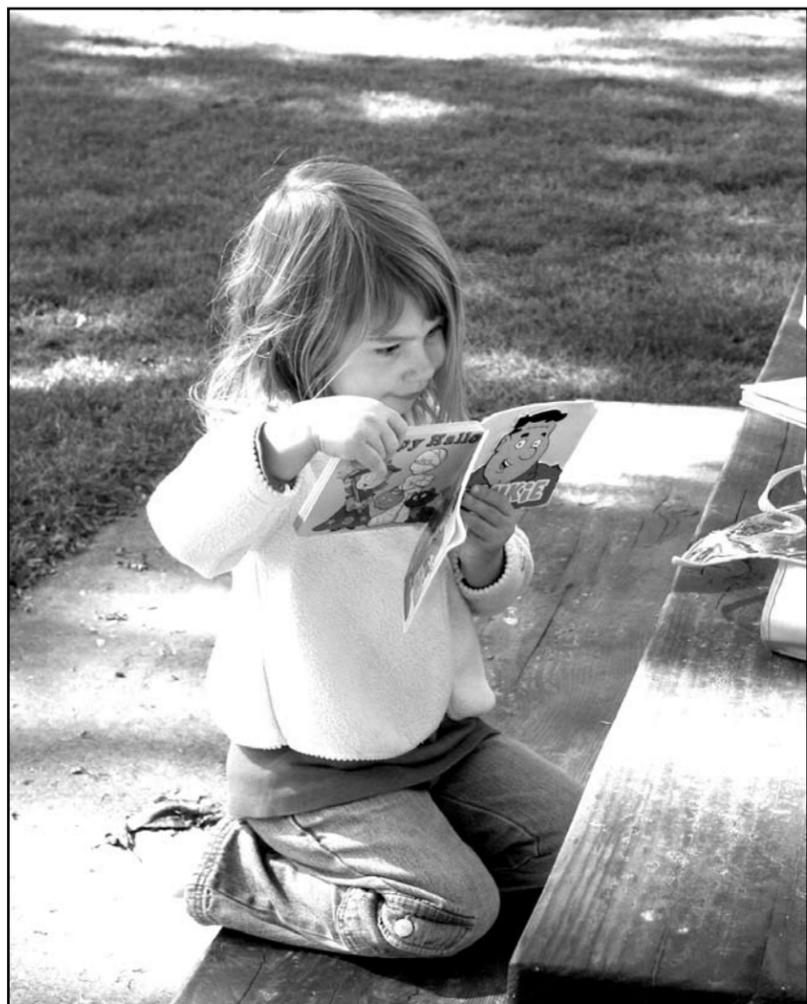


Photo by Jen Reeder

Mead resident Emily Riley, 3, reads a Halloween book in the park behind Mead Town Hall on Oct. 15.

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