

Flu season is on its way bringing coughs, aches, fevers and sometimes more serious complications.

Comanche County Health Department will begin giving influenza vaccinations Monday to help protect anyone who wants to be protected during the upcoming flu season. Clinics at Comanche County Health Department, 1010 SW Sheridan Road, are scheduled from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. Clients need to be at the clinic no later than 4 p.m. the day they want the vaccination. There are no fees for those who meet certain criteria, described below.

“Flu can be a dangerous disease for people of all ages, even healthy children and adults,” said Keith Reed, administrative director for the Comanche County Health Department. “We encourage everyone in Comanche County to protect themselves and their families by getting their annual flu shot.”

Flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older. Persons at high risk of serious complications from the flu are strongly encouraged to get the vaccine. Those in the high risk categories include pregnant women and people with asthma, diabetes, chronic heart and lung disease, or other chronic conditions. Parents and family members of babies less than 6 months of age and people who live with or care for anyone in the high risk categories, including health care workers, should also get the vaccine.

Public health officials stress that while strains of flu in the vaccine this year are the same as last year, vaccination is still needed, because immunity from a dose received last year will not provide protection this year.

“Getting an annual flu shot is the most important step in protecting against the flu,” Reed said. “Influenza vaccine is very safe and effective.”

High-dose flu vaccine, a vaccine with four times the antigen than regular flu vaccine, will be available for persons 65 and older.

“Immune systems are less responsive as people age. The high-dose vaccine should provide more protection, although it may come with a slightly higher chance for typical side effects like sore arm, headache, and low fever,” Reed said.

In addition to getting a flu vaccination, persons 65 and older and those with chronic health conditions should ask their doctor if they should be vaccinated against pneumococcal pneumonia, if they have not already received a dose. Pneumococcal pneumonia is a common and potentially serious complication of the flu. Unlike the influenza vaccine, the pneumococcal vaccine does not need to be given every year.

Flu vaccine will be provided at Comanche County Health Department using the following fee schedule:

There is no charge for adults 65 years of age or older; children who have no health insurance; children who are on SoonerCare or are native American or Alaskan natives; and children whose health insurance does not cover vaccine.

There is also no charge for families whose yearly or monthly income is less than or equal to the amounts shown in the Flu Vaccine Fee Determination table.

Families with health insurance that covers vaccines and with incomes above the income levels in the table will be charged \$25 to cover the costs of the vaccine and administering the vaccine. There is no proof of income required, Reed said. Cash, check and credit cards will be accepted for payment.

The department will only accept insurance from Health Choice and Oklahoma Public Employee Health and Welfare. Those who have health insurance from other companies and are above the income level guidelines may want to go to their own physician for the flu vaccine rather than pay out of pocket.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that in addition to the flu

vaccine, which is “the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease,” that everyday preventive steps can be taken. These prevention methods are “staying away from sick people,” and, the very important, “washing your hands to reduce the spread of germs.” People with the flu should stay home from school or work in order to prevent spreading the disease.

For more information about Comanche County Health Department flu clinics, call 248-5890.