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Influenza Immunization Program begins Oct. 20
AHS urges Albertans to arm themselves against influenza

CALGARY – Starting Monday, Albertans will have the opportunity to get protected – and not infected – with the launch of Alberta's annual influenza immunization program.

Offering influenza immunization, free of charge, to all Albertans six months of age and older, Alberta's program will make both injectible (flu shot) and nasal spray (FluMist) vaccine easily available at hundreds of Alberta Health Services (AHS) public influenza immunization clinics, pharmacists and physician offices around the province.

Influenza has not yet arrived in Alberta but it is imminent. Because it takes about two weeks after immunization to be fully protected, AHS is encouraging all Albertans to get it before they need it.

"Influenza arrives every year. The good news is, influenza vaccines get here first," says Dr. Judy MacDonald, Medical Officer of Health for the Calgary Zone. "This year, we strongly encourage Albertans to take advantage and get immunized before influenza arrives."

Immunization is the single most effective means of protection against the strains of influenza virus expected to circulate this season. Because those strains change from season to season, Albertans are reminded they cannot rely on having been immunized in previous years.

"It's pretty simple: to be protected this season, you need to be immunized this season. Without immunization, you are at risk," says Dr. MacDonald.

That risk is not something to be underestimated. Last season, more that 1,200 Albertans were hospitalized – and 30 died – due to influenza. Thousands more suffered from the illness and put those around them at risk of contracting influenza as well.

"Albertans should think of influenza immunization as their armour against an invading enemy," says Dr. MacDonald. "Be battle ready: arm yourself against influenza by getting immunized before it arrives."

For more information, Albertans can visit www.albertahealthservices.ca/influenza or call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5465.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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