

Officials say more flu vaccines on the way

By Angie Wagner and Daniel Yee
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The number of states hit hard by the flu has nearly doubled to 24 in the past week, the government said Thursday as it rushed to ship 100,000 doses of the vaccine to combat shortages and head off what could become one of the worst flu seasons in years.

The outbreak has taken an enormous toll nationwide: At least 23 children have died. Schools have shut down. Emergency rooms have been filled with sick children. And doctors' offices have been forced to turn away droves of people seeking flu shots.

Some experts predict this year's death toll easily could surpass the annual average of 36,000 flu deaths. Health officials are unsure why the outbreak has hit so early, why it has caused so many problems in the West, and why it seems to be so lethal in children.

"If it were me, I'd be on the phone to your doctor, calling around to see if you could find some" vaccine, said Dr. Randall Todd, Nevada's epidemiologist.

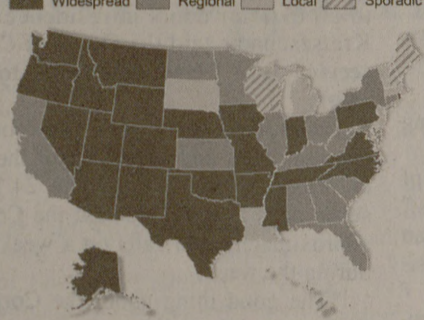
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the flu has hit all 50 states at least sporadically, and the season has not yet peaked nationally. Nearly the entire western half of the country — California being the major exception — is now considered to have widespread flu. Last week, 13 states had widespread outbreaks.

Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson said the government had arranged for 100,000 doses of adult vaccine to be shipped from Aventis Pasteur immediately

Nearly half of 50 states hit hard with flu

Officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced on Thursday that the flu is widespread in 24 states.

Influenza activity
 ■ Widespread ■ Regional □ Local ▨ Sporadic



SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention AP

and distributed based on each state's population. In addition, 150,000 doses of children's vaccine are expected to be shipped to the states by January, Thompson said.

The nation's two producers of flu shots reported last week that they had shipped their entire supply of about 80 million doses. However, Aventis had set aside 250,000 doses at the CDC's request last week when it became clear that shortages might develop.

Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the CDC, said the center is recommending that doctors give high-risk groups top priority for flu shots. That means the elderly, children under 2, those with chronic medical conditions, and women in the second and third trimester of pregnancy.

"The flu season is far from over, we are

going to have to prioritize," Gerberding said.

Around the country, several schools closed because so many students are out with the flu.

In Colchester, Conn., the public Bacon Academy closed Thursday after more than 300 students — more than one-third of the student body — called out sick with flu-like symptoms. Madison Junior High in Mansfield, Ohio, also closed for the rest of the week after 250 of 900 students were out sick Wednesday, principal Timothy Rupert said.

"We've never closed down for flu," said Rupert, who has worked at the school about 60 miles north of Columbus for 23 years.

One of the hardest hit communities was Malad, Idaho, a town of about 2,000 people near the Utah state line that virtually shut down in the past week because so many people were ill. Church services and Christmas programs were canceled, as was the wrestling match and drill team show. Even Santa had to postpone his visit with the children.

Students in Malad returned to class on Thursday, but 15 percent of the 860 students were still out sick.

"It's the worst I've seen in many years," said School Superintendent Lynn Schow. "We think we're OK here, and it hit us hard."

In Las Vegas, residents had to wait hours to get flu shots.

"We are out of the vaccine at this point," said Jennifer Sizemore, spokeswoman for the Clark County Health District. "We are working hard to get some more because there's still a demand out there."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Interest group ads cannot name presidential candidates in coming weeks

WASHINGTON (AP) — Abortion rights, environmental and other lobbying groups running ads for or against President Bush or any of his Democratic rivals now have a choice to make: Either remove the candidate's name or pull the commercial from the airwaves.

The campaign finance law that the Supreme Court upheld Wednesday bans ads that mention candidates for federal office within 30 days of a primary election and 60 days of a general election if they are paid for with "soft money."

The huge, unlimited donations from corporations, unions and individuals typically are used to broadcast so-called "issue ads," which critics say are really intended to sway voters just before an election and often include sharp critiques of candidates.

The restrictions kick in Sunday, 30 days before the District of Columbia's nonbinding presidential primary. They next take effect Dec. 20 in Iowa, which holds its caucuses Jan. 19, and Dec. 28

in New Hampshire, where the primary is Jan. 27. They also apply to House and Senate races.

The limits do not apply to the candidates themselves, which means that anyone running for president or another federal office could name a rival in a spot airing within days of an election.

U.S.-backed proposal to end nuclear crisis delivered to North Korea

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea tried to bolster hopes for a breakthrough in the North Korean nuclear crisis on Thursday, as China confirmed delivery of a pivotal U.S.-backed plan for easing tensions to North Korea.

The United States, Japan and South Korea presented a blueprint for ending the standoff to China, which is playing the role of mediator, earlier this week but a report Wednesday said Beijing found the plan unacceptable and never bothered relaying it.

On Thursday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said the proposal was delivered to Pyongyang.

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DEADLINE: 5 p.m. **Thursday, Dec. 11**, for editor positions and **Monday, Dec. 15**, for staff positions. Turn in applications at 014 (basement) Reed McDonald Bldg. Interviews will begin immediately after application deadline.

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