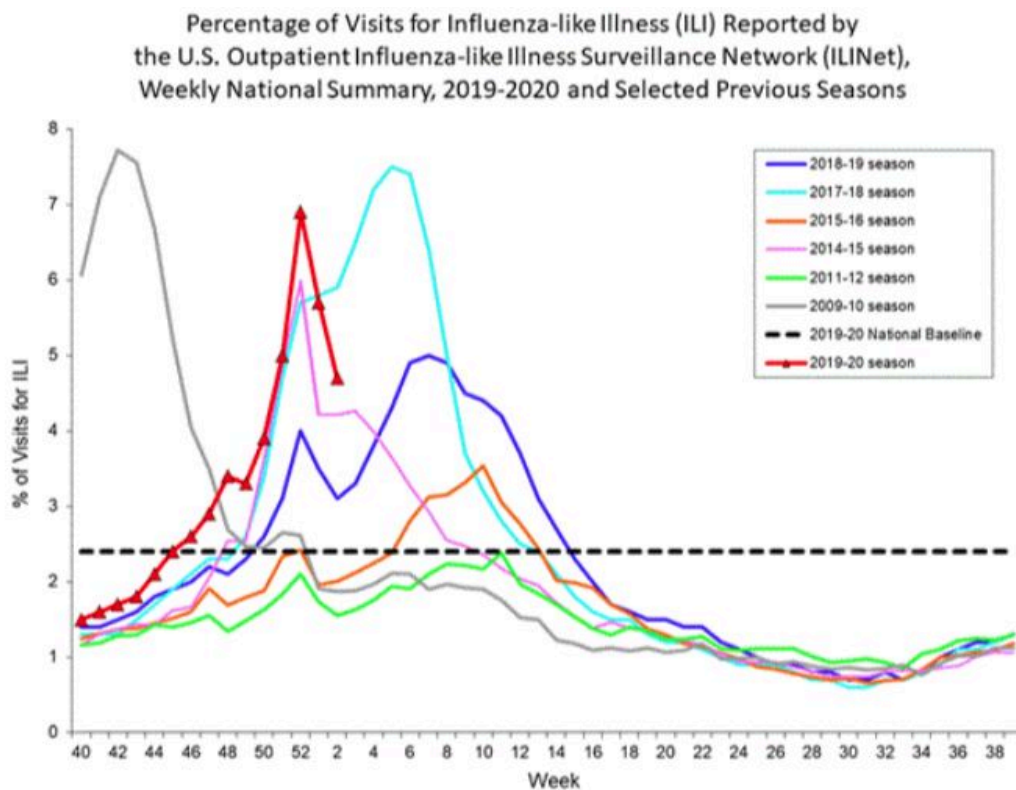


County officials confirm a worrisome flu season

January 29, 2020



Midway through this season’s peak flu season, which lasts between December and February, health officials said Del Norte County is experiencing high flu levels along with the rest of California and U.S.

Heather Snow, director of Del Norte County Department of Health and Social Services, said this year’s flu season kicked off earlier than usual, and that the peak season can continue well into May.

“This flu season got an early start, beginning about a month earlier than usually expected, with high activity levels early in the season,” Snow said by email.

“Also, California had a pediatric influenza death in September of 2019, which was startlingly early in the season and was a chilling reminder of just how deadly influenza can be.”

Influenza deaths this season have continued an upward trend from the previous two years. Between Sept. 29, 2019 and Jan. 11, 2020, 105 deaths were reported in California.

None have been reported in Del Norte County, Snow said.

“At this same time during last year’s flu season, there were about 75 deaths reported in California. In the 2017-18 flu season, at this time there were only 32 reported deaths in California,” Snow said.

But Snow said it’s too early to tell by the numbers alone how bad a season this year is historically.

“So far, the CDC has estimated that there have been anywhere from 13 million to 18 million influenza cases in the U.S. and an estimated 6,600 deaths from the influenza virus,” she said. “While the percentage of provider visits for influenza-like illness surpassed the peak of the 2014-2015 season, there has been a decrease in activity over the last week.

“It’s too soon to tell if the season has already peaked or not, and if it’s the ‘worst ever.’”

Snow said experts often look at the flu season in the Southern Hemisphere (which occurs from April to September) as an indicator for how the season will be in the Northern Hemisphere. She said Southern Hemisphere countries, such as Australia, reported record numbers of influenza cases.

She added that the geography of Del Norte County can favor its residents during flu season.

“Being a geographically isolated community does sometimes have benefits, but influenza is a highly contagious virus.

“We strongly encourage everyone 6 months and older in Del Norte County to be involved in preventing influenza from spreading here by getting your flu vaccines,” she said.

Nationally, 172.2 million doses have been distributed, which has exceeded the initial prediction of 169 million needed doses, Snow said.

Flu vaccines are still readily available in Del Norte County in private provider offices, clinics, pharmacies and at Del Norte County Public Health.

Snow said the flu vaccine won't treat any of its symptoms. Rather, the vaccine helps prevent illness and decreases the severity.