

As coronavirus vaccine nears, county health officer emphasizes need to get influenza vaccine

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While the world is now about halfway through the “introduction period” of the coronavirus, Del Norte’s health officer is reminding residents it’s the start of the influenza season.

In his letter to the community Sept. 29, Dr. Warrent Rehwaldt Del Norte County Public Health Office is planning for the eventual rollout of a vaccine for the coronavirus, which may be available in the next few months.

“Other vaccines are on the way, and by this time next year, I think it is safe to say that most Americans and many others around the globe will have had their first COVID vaccines,” Rehwaldt said.

However, he wanted to focus his message on vaccines that are available now — the influenza vaccine.

With the overlap in precautions for both the coronavirus and the flu virus — social distance, face coverings, hand hygiene, cleaning — Rehwaldt said there are ground to believe the upcoming flu season will be at a

pretty low level.

“But, we in public health and others in the medical community really want to take this season’s flu out of the picture as much as possible,” Rehwaldt said. “This means people need to get vaccinated, especially with schools reopening.”

He explained that the Southern Hemisphere has already gone through its flu season, as it is opposite to ours. By emphasizing everyone get vaccinated, they’ve experienced a quite good season, Rehwaldt said.

“There are very few good reasons for not getting a vaccine,” he said.

First, Rehwaldt said you do not get the flu from getting the flu shot. He explained that only the inhaled spray uses any kind of live virus. However, it’s been made to not be infectious inside the body because it’s temperature sensitive.

A flu shot can sometimes trigger a reaction that resembles a mild case of the flu, giving recipients what medical professionals call “influenza-like illness,” Rehwaldt explained.

Second, influenza vaccines are no longer depend on a virus being grown in chicken eggs, which has been standard procedure for decades. This means that even those with true egg allergies can still get a safe version of the flu vaccine, he said.

“So, for the good of all, please get vaccinated for the flu this season,” Rewaldt added. “It helps keep people safe from bad cases of the flu, helps us keep our hospital running smoothly, and most of all this year, it will enable our medical professionals to be better focused on COVID-19.”

Speaking of the pandemic, Rewaldt said every new germ that has ever affected humans has probably gone through that same initial introduction phase, where it runs through the population and affects everybody.

“In the past, that is what was called plagues. How it affects people at the time depends on the nature of the germ, and how well we can develop immunity,” he said.

The good news, Rewaldt added, is evidence is showing the human body’s immune system is remembering the coronavirus like it does other infections, building up its immunity.

“Most immunity is sort of partial immunity; you get sick with something the first time and it may knock you down for quite a while but the next time you catch it, the infection is much reduced,” Rehwaldt explained.

“Your immune system remembers that particular germ and goes into high gear right away the next time. We are starting to see signs that COVID is likely to behave this way in humans as well, which is a good thing.”

He added the key for COIVD-19 vaccines development is their ability to trigger the body’s immune system to remember its exposure to the coronavirus.