

New immunizations help you stay well this winter

By Brenda Koch

Respiratory virus season is coming, so fall is the time to get vaccinations. This year, in addition to your annual influenza vaccine, we have updated COVID-19 vaccines as well as RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) vaccine.

The influenza vaccine helps prevent illness and decreases the severity of your symptoms. The goal is to prevent hospitalization and death. When we choose to be immunized, we protect vulnerable people – our parents, grandparents or little ones under the age of six months who are not able to receive the vaccine. When we are immunized, we contribute to a healthier community and reduce the burden on our healthcare system.

Because the influenza virus changes from year to year, an annual dose is needed to ensure you have protection against the current flu strains.

COVID-19 virus is still in circulation and cases are being reported daily in Yellowstone County and around our nation. The virus has mutated, so medical researchers have developed new vaccines to better target these new variants. The newest vaccines are modified versions of existing vaccines. Everyone six months of age and older is encouraged to receive an updated COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible. Most people need only a single dose.

RSV has long been known to cause severe respiratory infections in infants, but it can also affect older adults, especially those with weakened immune systems or underlying health conditions. Like influenza, RSV can lead to hospitalization and death. This fall we have an RSV vaccine authorized for adults 60 years of age and older. This vaccine has been studied and found to be highly effective at preventing serious disease. The RSV vaccine is a single dose.

Vaccines are generally safe and have undergone rigorous testing in clinical trials prior to approval for use by the public. Vaccines can have side effects, but serious ones are rare. Benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks for most people. Please visit with your healthcare provider about any concerns you have. Often a conversation with a trusted professional will help alleviate fears with knowledge.

RiverStone Health Immunization Clinic, 123 S. 27th St., offers all routinely recommended vaccines for adults and children, including flu and COVID-19 shots and the RSV vaccination for older adults. Appointments are available by calling 406-247-3382.

We have scheduled a series of clinics at senior meal sites where people can receive the flu shot, COVID-19 vaccination or both. All clinics listed below will run from 11 a.m. till noon.

- Tuesday, Oct. 3, King of Glory Lutheran Church, 4125 Grand Ave.
- Wednesday, Oct. 4, Shepherd senior meal site, 5541 Haynes Rd.
- Thursday, Oct. 5, Heights senior meal site, 935 Lake Elmo Dr.

- Friday, Oct. 6, Worden senior meal site, 2445 Main Street.
- Tuesday, Oct. 10, Adult Resource Alliance senior meal site, 1505 Avenue D.
- Wednesday, Oct. 11, Laurel senior meal site, 720 South Fourth Street.
- Thursday, Oct. 12, Custer senior meal site, 322 Sixth Street.
- Friday, Oct. 13, South Park Senior Citizens Center, 901 S. 30th Street.

Brenda Koch manages the RiverStone Health immunization program.