

# Flu activity in the U.S. is the highest it's been in nearly a decade

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Simone Groper (left) receives a flu shot at a pharmacy on January 22, 2018, in San Francisco, California. A strong strain of H3N2 influenza has claimed the lives of 74 Californians under the age of 65 since the flu season began in October of last year. People are being encouraged to get flu shots even though the vaccine has been only 30 percent effective in combating the influenza. Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Flu is sweeping the United States. U.S. officials announced on January 26 that the flu has killed at least 37 children so far. And, it is sending more people to the doctor than any influenza outbreak has since 2009's "swine flu."

This year, the most common strain of flu is H3N2. Nearly every state has been hit hard by the illness, said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"For the past three weeks, the entire country has been experiencing lots of flu, all at the same time," Dr. Dan Jernigan told reporters. Jernigan heads the Influenza Division at the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, part of the CDC.

This marks the "most flu activity since 2009," Jernigan told reporters over the phone.

## **The "Swine Flu" Pandemic Of 2009**

A total of 6.6 percent of all people seeking medical care so far this season did so because of the flu, he said.

"This is the highest level of activity recorded since the 2009 pandemic, which peaked at 7.7 percent," Jernigan said. A pandemic is an illness that spreads over a large part of the world.

The 2009 H1N1 pandemic was widely known as "swine flu." People in the past used to get it after having contact with pigs. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports it swept 206 countries and overseas territories and killed more than 6,770 people.

The 2009 outbreak is considered very unusual. The CDC is not taking that flu pandemic into account. Instead, they consider the most recent season when as many Americans sought care for the flu was 2003–2004. The flu level peaked at 7.6 percent, said Jernigan.

## **The Flu Season Is Halfway Over**

What really sets this season apart is that the flu became widespread in almost all states and at the same time, said Jernigan.

"Flu activity has stayed at the same level — at the national level — for three weeks in a row," Jernigan said. Forty-nine states have reported large numbers of cases.

The bulk of flu cases have been among those over 50.

The true severity of this season will not be known for months until all the data is collected and analyzed.

The flu season can run from October to May, meaning the current one is only about halfway over.

In past seasons that were like this one, Jernigan said, around 34 million Americans ended up getting the flu.

## **Health Officials Want People To Get Vaccinated**

An average of 56,000 people died during each previous H3N2 outbreak, Jernigan added.

Doctors expect more children to die of the flu this year. In addition, the actual number of children who have died from the flu so far this season may be twice the current estimate.

Doctors are concerned by the high number of H3N2 cases this season because H3N2 is more deadly than many other types of the flu.

Health officials are urging people to get vaccinated to protect themselves from H3N2. There are questions about the shot's effectiveness, however, though getting vaccinated is still better than nothing.

Unfortunately, the vaccines "just don't do that well against H3N2," said Jernigan.

## Quiz

- 1 Which section highlights the idea that officials will need more time before they understand the extent of this flu season's effects?
- (A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-4]
  - (B) "The Swine Flu Pandemic Of 2009"
  - (C) "The Flu Season Is Halfway Over"
  - (D) "Health Officials Want People To Get Vaccinated"

- 2 Read the following statement.

*This year's flu outbreak is dangerous but not unprecedented.*

Which sentence from the article provides the BEST support for the statement above?

- (A) And, it is sending more people to the doctor than any influenza outbreak has since 2009's "swine flu."
  - (B) Nearly every state has been hit hard by the illness, said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
  - (C) A total of 6.6 percent of all people seeking medical care so far this season did so because of the flu, he said.
  - (D) "Flu activity has stayed at the same level — at the national level — for three weeks in a row," Jernigan said.
- 3 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) A pandemic is an illness that spreads over a large part of the world.
  - (B) What really sets this season apart is that the flu became widespread in almost all states and at the same time, said Jernigan.
  - (C) The flu season can run from October to May, meaning the current one is only about halfway over.
  - (D) Unfortunately, the vaccines "just don't do that well against H3N2," said Jernigan.

- 4 Read the following paragraphs from the section "Health Officials Want People To Get Vaccinated."

*An average of 56,000 people died during each previous H3N2 outbreak, Jernigan added.*

*Doctors expect more children to die of the flu this year. In addition, the actual number of children who have died from the flu so far this season may be twice the current estimate.*

*Doctors are concerned by the high number of H3N2 cases this season because H3N2 is more deadly than many other types of the flu.*

How is a central idea MOST developed in these paragraphs?

- (A) by describing how the flu was able to spread so quickly
- (B) by comparing this year's H3N2 outbreak with the 2009 swine flu
- (C) by illustrating the ways people can protect themselves from the flu
- (D) by emphasizing the dangerous nature of this type of flu