

# Vaccine covers most types of flu

**T**he state Health Department recently identified a strain of the flu virus in Hawaii that is immune to the influenza vaccine now being used.

The Type A Sydney virus was identified in a flu outbreak that killed five Kaneohe nursing home residents in September. The Health Department said this year's flu vaccine does not cover the Type A Sydney virus, but there are antiviral drugs against the virus.

The department recommends that people at risk of catching the flu should still get the vaccine, which covers three strains of the influenza Type A virus.

The flu season usually runs from December to March.

Here are some common questions and answers about the flu.

**Q. How is the flu transmitted?**

**A.** The flu virus is transmitted easily through coughing and sneezing. It can also be transmitted through close contact.

**Q. How serious is the flu?**

**A.** Most people who catch the flu recover within one to two weeks. Symptoms include fever, coughing, sore throat, runny nose, headache, muscle aches and extreme fatigue. However, some people can develop life-threatening complications such as pneumonia. In an average season, influenza is associated with 20,000 deaths nationwide, most of them among people over age 65.

**Q. Who is most at risk of catching the flu?**

**A.** Those at risk include people 65 or older, residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities; adults and children who have a chronic illness, a medical condition of the lungs or heart or a chronic metabolic disease (such as diabetes mellitus); and children and teenagers from 6 months to 18 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy.

However, the Health Department recommends that everyone be immunized.

**Q. Is the flu vaccine covered by Medicare?**

**A.** Shots are free for people enrolled in Medicare Part B from doctors who accept Medicare as a full payment. Medicare also covers vaccinations against pneumonia.

For information about receiving a flu shot covered by Medicare, contact 1-800-638-6833.

**Q. How can I get more information about the flu and the vaccine?**

**A.** Consult your doctor first about the influenza vaccine. For other information about the flu, call the Epidemiology Branch on Oahu at 586-4586; Big Island at 933-4539; Maui at 984-8213; and Kauai at 241-3563.

You can also call the Lung Association at 1-800-LUNG-USA.

Source: State Health Department; American Lung Association and the Centers for Dis-