

Hawaii diabetics targeted for flu shots this season

Others at high risk for flu:

- Those 65 and older
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities
- Adults and children with chronic heart or lung disorders, including children with asthma
- Those with chronic metabolic diseases, renal dysfunction, or immunosuppression
- Children/teens on aspirin therapy, who might develop Reye's syndrome after flu
- Women in second and third trimester of pregnancy during flu season
- Care-givers for those in above categories

By Beverly Creamer
Advertiser Health Writer

With flu season approaching, the state Health Department is urging diabetics, in particular, not to miss getting influenza shots.

"People who have diabetes are more susceptible to contracting the flu, and once they get it, they're going to be sicker for a longer period of time," said James Rarick, coordinator of the department's Hawaii State Diabetes Control Program.

"We have a higher prevalence of diabetes in Hawaii than on the Mainland, so the impact is going to be higher here for us in terms of people getting sick and having problems," he said.

The Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

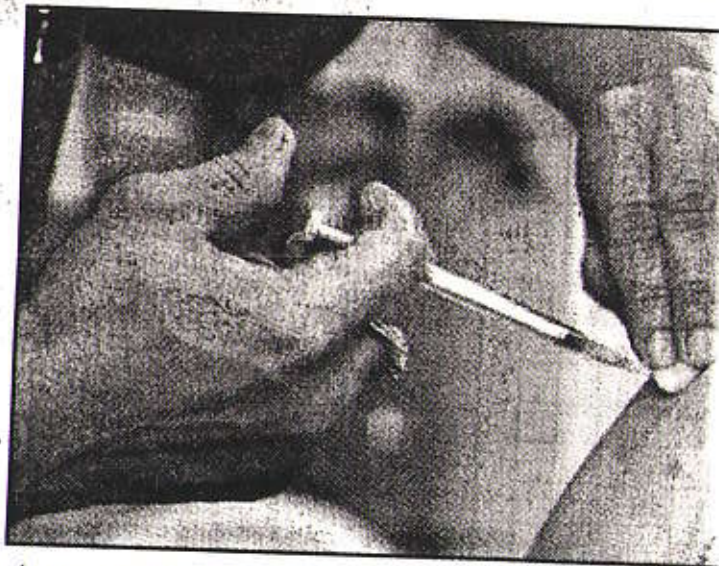
is urging diabetics nationwide to get flu shots, but the message is of special concern in Hawaii, because of the state's higher-than-average diabetes rate.

"In general, Asian and Pacific Islanders have a higher prevalence," said Rarick. "I've heard it characterized as an assault of Western lifestyle. (They've gone from eating) taro and fish to eating cornbread and white flour."

"It's not just diet," continued Rarick. "It's a sedentary lifestyle. People are not nearly as active, and they're eating a higher-calorie diet."

"We have data by geographic regions," said Rarick. "We're seeing higher prevalences in Waimanalo and Waianae, east Hawaii, Hilo."

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Clinics set up in local stores by Castle Medical Center's staff have already started offering flu shots. Nurses administer shots, which have a small charge for most people but are free with Medicare Part B. Pneumonia shots are also available.