



AS IT IS

Flu Is Making a Comeback in US After an Unusual Year Off

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Flu season has arrived in the United States, after taking an unusual year off. Flu hospitalizations are rising, and at least two child deaths have been reported.

Last year's flu season was the lowest on record. COVID-19 protection measures — such as school closures, distancing, masks and canceled travel — likely prevented the spread of influenza.

"This is setting itself up to be more of a normal flu season," said Lynnette Brammer. She studies flu-like illnesses for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The childhood deaths, Brammer said, are "**unfortunately** what we would expect when flu activity picks up. It's a sad reminder of how severe flu can be."

During last year's unusually light flu season, only one child died. Two years ago, 199 children died from flu, and 144 the year before that.

In the newest data, the most severe flu activity was in the U.S. capital, Washington, D.C. The number of states with high flu activity rose from three to seven. Recent data show high flu activity in New Mexico, Kansas, Indiana, New Jersey, Tennessee, Georgia and North Dakota.

The type of flu virus this year seems to cause the largest amount of severe disease, especially in the elderly and the very young, Brammer said.

Last year's break from the flu made it more difficult to plan for this year's flu vaccine. Brammer said it is too early to know whether small changes to the flu virus this year will affect the flu vaccine's effectiveness.

"We'll have to see what the impact of these little changes" will be, she added. "Flu vaccine is your best way to protect yourself against flu."

Early signs show that fewer people are getting flu shots this year compared to 2020. Brammer said with hospitals already affected by COVID-19, it is more important than ever to get a flu shot and take other safety measures.

"Cover your cough. Wash your hands. Stay home if you're sick," she said. "If you do get flu, there are anti-virals you can talk to your doctor about that can prevent severe illness and help you stay out of the hospital."

I'm Jonathan Evans.

Jonathan Evans adapted this story for Learning English based on a report from the Associated Press. Susan Shand was the editor.

Words in This Story

unfortunately – *adv.* used to say that something bad or unlucky has happened
