

N4T Investigators: Flu cases on the rise in Arizona

Paul Birmingham 10:30 pm January 10, 2019

TUCSON – Make no mistake, flu season is here, and health experts say things could go from bad to worse.

So, just how widespread is influenza in Arizona this season, and what can parents do to protect their little ones?

“It is concerning, especially after the flu last year. It was very bad,” said Tucson mom, Brittanie Champion.

For parents like Champion, keeping kids healthy during flu season, is priority one.

“I always keep an eye out for the cough of course, that’s usually the first sign,” Champion told the News 4 Tucson Investigators.

Health experts also the News 4 Tucson Investigators, keeping an eye and ear out for those first flu symptoms is critical.

“With the flu, it hits them so hard that it’s important to get in early, because if they don’t get in early, then the symptoms will last longer than expected,” Tucson pediatrician, Dr. Duane Dyson told the News 4 Tucson Investigators.

Dr. Dyson’s practice has been busy over the past few months, and it’s getting busier by the day.

“It’s definitely starting to ramp up. January and February, I expect to be rough,” Dr. Dyson told the News 4 Tucson Investigators.

In fact, the Arizona Department of Health Services reports more than 400 flu cases in Pima County alone – and one group has been especially hard hit.

“This influenza season, we are seeing a higher percentage of children impacted by the flu than we typically see,” said Jessica Rigler, with the Arizona Department of Health Services.

It’s all the more reason the Pima County Health Department is stressing the flu vaccine for children as young as six-months.

“We often will see cases all the way through the summertime, and so, that’s why even now is a good time to get your children vaccinated, if they haven’t been yet,” Rigler added.

The Pima County Health Department offers flu shots, even for people who do not have medical insurance.

“We want to make sure that we our vaccinating our children, our infants, and our adults to protect our community,” said Pima County Health Department assistant director, Paula Mandel.

Health experts also stress common-sense tips, including frequent hand-washing, to help stop the spread of influenza.

“Don’t share drinks, make sure you cover your mouth with your arm when you cough and sneeze, and then avoid other people that you know that are starting to feel under the weather,” Dr. Dyson told the News 4 Tucson Investigators.

Most of all, if you or your kids are coming down with the flu, the best advice, is to just stay home, until they are fever-free for 24 hours.

“Make sure to keep your kids home, so they can get plenty of rest and get better, and so other kids don’t get it too,” Champion added.

The state Department of Health Services says Even though the number of cases is rising, it’s still about half the number as last year.