

What to do about flu season in Madison County

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - While it may seem like it on social media, the flu is not currently an epidemic in Madison County, Illinois or anywhere in the United States at this time.

In fact, Madison County Health Department Education Coordinator Amy Yeager said the flu is at increasing levels, but that is simply because it is flu season. Unlike states like Missouri, however, Illinois does not include the flu as a reported disease. Yeager said the state does have "sentinel centers," which tabulate data such as flu rates. As of

right now, those numbers coming into the health department are not reflecting epidemic numbers.

To prevent the flu's spread - a cause Yeager warned not to downplay despite it not yet being an epidemic - Yeager advises people get the flu shot. That vaccine is available at many locations, including the Madison County Health Department, doctors' offices, pharmacies and even retail locations offer flu shots this time of year.

"Right now would be the perfect time to get the shot, because it takes about two weeks to take effect," Yeager said. "That would make it kick in right around the same time as the holidays."

As of now, the flu has taken hold the worst in Mississippi and Louisiana, where Yeager said it is officially "widespread." It is also moderately high in South Carolina and Georgia.

Yeager said those numbers from across the country are important for travelers to consider before they leave for the holidays - possibly traveling to those afflicted states.

While the flu can sometimes be fatal to vulnerable populations, and this strain seems to be pretty nasty based on social media status updates and firsthand accounts, Yeager said no one in the area has succumbed to it at this time.