

FOR RELEASE #03-241
October 30, 2003

YUKON RESIDENTS REMINDED TO GET FLU SHOT

WHITEHORSE – Yukon’s Communicable Disease Officer Colleen Hemsley is reminding Yukon residents to protect themselves and those around them by getting their flu shot this year. Less than two weeks into the three-month 2003 flu vaccination campaign, the number of Yukoners taking advantage of the free influenza vaccine is already at the half-way mark for the total number last year.

“People are paying more attention to the flu this year,” Hemsley said. “The SARS situation earlier this year created an awareness that wasn’t there before and I think people want to protect themselves in any way they can.”

Hemsley is urging individuals 65 and older, and others at high risk, to get the vaccine. It is available free of charge to all adults over 18 through the Whitehorse Health Centre, Kwanlin Dun Health Centre and community health centres in rural Yukon communities.

“The vaccine is free and getting it means people can protect themselves and those around them against the flu at the same time. It can also reduce the impact on the health care system during flu season,” Hemsley added.

The flu vaccine produces antibodies which then prevent infection or reduce the likelihood of severe illness should infection occur. High-risk individuals include seniors, adults and children with lung disease, extended care facility residents and staff, and anyone with a chronic disease such as diabetes, cancer, kidney disease, and HIV. The vaccine is also recommended for people who are capable of transmitting influenza to those at high risk (health care workers and household contacts) and those providing essential community services.

“People often get confused between a stomach illness that includes nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, and the flu,” Hemsley explained. “Flu symptoms include sudden high fever, headache, loss of appetite, severe muscle aches and pain, extreme fatigue and weakness, chills, dry cough, sweating, and sometimes sore throat, runny nose, nasal congestion and sneezing.

“The flu isn’t fun and I don’t understand why anyone would want to be miserable,” she added.

Whitehorse Health Centre is holding flu vaccination clinics until the end of December, in addition to satellite flu clinics at the Elijah Smith Building downtown and at Yukon College. Satellite clinics have already been held at Yukon government administration building and on Hospital Road. Rural Yukon residents should check with their community health centre for flu vaccination clinics in their community.

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