

## How the shutdown might affect your health

BY KHN STAFF  
KAISER HEALTH NEWS  
VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### US flu season gets worse, has 'lot more steam' than expected

NEW YORK (AP) — The flu season in the U.S. is getting worse.

Health officials last week said flu was blanketing the country but they thought there was a good chance the season was already peaking. But the newest numbers out Friday show it grew even more intense.

"This is a season that has a lot more steam than we thought," said Dr. Dan Jernigan of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

One measure of the season is how many doctor or hospital visits are because of a high fever, cough and other flu symptoms. Thirty-two states reported high patient traffic last week, up from 26 the previous week. Overall, it was the busiest week for flu symptoms in nine years.

Hawaii is the only state that doesn't have widespread illnesses.

This year's flu season got off to an early start, and it's been driven by a nasty type of flu that tends to put more people in the hospital and cause more deaths than other common flu bugs. In New York, state officials say a drastic rise in flu

cases hospitalized more than 1,600 this past week.

The flu became intense last month in the U.S. The last two weekly reports show flu widespread over the entire continental United States, which is unusual.

Usually, flu seasons start to wane after so much activity, but "it's difficult to predict," Jernigan said.

Flu is a contagious respiratory illness, spread by a virus. It can cause a miserable but relatively mild illness in many people, but more a more severe illness in others. Young children and the elderly are at greatest risk from flu and its complications. In a bad season, there as many as 56,000 deaths connected to the flu. In the U.S., annual flu shots are recommended for everyone age 6 months or older.

In Oklahoma and Texas, some school districts canceled classes this week because so many students and teachers were sick with the flu and other illnesses. In Mississippi, flu outbreaks have hit more than 100 nursing homes and other long-term care places, resulting in some restricting visitors.

### ACA PREMIUM SUBSIDIES

The shutdown will not affect some of the most politically charged health care programs, including ones created by the Affordable Care Act.

Subsidies for people who get their health insurance through healthcare.gov or state marketplaces will not be affected, according to HHS.

### VETERANS AFFAIRS

Staffing for the Department of Veterans Affairs will remain largely intact. "Even in the event that there is a shutdown, 95.5 percent of VA employees would come to work, and most aspects of VA's operations would not be impacted," said department press secretary Curtis Cashour in an email.

More than 99 percent of employees of the Veterans Health Administration, which runs the health care system, will continue working, according to the department's contingency plan.

However, the Veterans Benefits Administration, responsible for overseeing benefits such as life insurance and disability checks, will face larger cutbacks. Over a third of its employees face furlough under a government shutdown.

### FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

In the short term, the crucial activities that protect consumers will get done, said Jill Hartzler Warner, who was the associate commissioner for special medical programs at the FDA during the 2013 shutdown.

Programs that are critical for the public safety will continue, as will positions paid for by user fees, including work under the Center for Tobacco Products, according to the HHS plan.

The hundreds of staff members who conduct sample analysis and review entry of products into

the U.S. will continue to work. However, routine inspections and laboratory research will cease.

Warner, who left the agency in March 2017 and now works as an industry consultant, said grants for rare-disease drug development were determined in 2013 to not be necessary and were postponed.

### NUTRITION SERVICES FOR SENIORS

The Administration for Community Living will not be able to fund federal senior nutrition programs during any shutdown, according to HHS officials. But it was not immediately clear how quickly clients would be affected.

A shutdown could delay federal reimbursements to independent Meals on Wheels programs, which serve more than 2.4 million seniors nationwide, according to Colleen Psomas, a spokeswoman for Meals on Wheels America. That could force programs to expand waiting lists for meals, reduce meals or delivery days, or suspend service, she said.

The magnitude of the effect could vary by the length of the shutdown and any final allocation. Some programs, however, could weather a shutdown, staffers said. In Portland, Ore., Meals on Wheel People spokeswoman Julie Piper Finley said meal delivery there will not be suspended. That agency receives about 35 percent of its funding through the Older Americans Act, but raises the rest of the money, ensuring that services are not disrupted.

Meanwhile, services connected to food and nutrition services for other needy populations are likely to keep operating with state partners who have funding through February and, in some cases, March, according to a Department of Agriculture spokesperson. Those programs include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

A government shutdown will have far-reaching effects for public health, including the nation's response to the current, difficult flu season. It will also disrupt some federally supported health services, experts said Friday.

In all, the Department of Health and Human Services will send home — or furlough — about half of its employees, or nearly 41,000 people, according to an HHS shutdown contingency plan released Friday.

Here are some federal services and programs consumers might be wondering about:

### CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

According to the HHS plan, the CDC will suspend its flu-tracking program. That's bad timing, given the country is at the height of a particularly bad flu season, said Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Without the CDC's updates, doctors could have a harder time diagnosing and treating patients quickly, he said.

Although states will still track flu cases, "they won't be able to call CDC to verify samples or seek their expertise," said Dr. Thomas Frieden, who was the director of the agency during the 2013 government shutdown.

A government shutdown will also affect the CDC's involvement in key decisions about next year's flu vaccine, which are scheduled to be made in coming weeks, said Dr. Arnold Monto, a professor of global public health at the University of Michigan.

Beyond the flu, the CDC will provide only "minimal support" to programs that investigate infectious-disease outbreaks. The Atlanta-based agency's ability to test suspicious pathogens and maintain its 24-hour emer-

gency operations center will be "significantly reduced," according to the plan.

That could prevent the CDC from identifying clusters of symptoms and disease "that are the earliest indicators of outbreaks," Frieden said.

### NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

Although the NIH will continue to treat patients at its clinical center in Bethesda, Md., the agency will not enroll new patients in clinical trials — which many people with life-threatening illnesses see as their last hope.

### MEDICARE

Beneficiaries will be largely unaffected by a shutdown, especially if it is short. Patients will continue to receive their insurance coverage, and Medicare will continue to process reimbursement pay-

ments to medical providers. But those checks could be delayed if the shutdown is prolonged.

### MEDICAID

States already have their funding for Medicaid through the second quarter, so no shortfall in coverage for enrollees or payments to providers is expected. Enrolling new Medicaid applicants is a state function, so that process should not be affected.

States also handle much of the Children's Health Insurance Program, which provides coverage for lower-income children whose families earn too much to qualify for Medicaid. But federal funding for CHIP is running dry — its regular authorization expired on Oct. 1, and Congress has not agreed on a long-term funding solution. Federal officials announced Friday that the staff necessary to make payments to states running low on funds will continue to work during a shutdown.

### COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

According to the HHS plan, the Health Resources and Services Administration will continue to operate the nation's 1,400 community health centers — clinics that serve about 27 million low-income people, providing preventive care, dentistry and other basic services. It will also continue the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, which targets low-income and at-risk families with house calls and lessons for healthy parenting. That program served about 160,000 families in fiscal year 2016.

But even those programs may not be at full speed. Funding for community health centers and the home visiting program was not renewed last fall — a casualty of Congress' fight over the CHIP reauthorization — so, they are operating on left-over funds.

### SENIOR HAPPENINGS

• Inter-generational chess league through March 21st, 6-7:30 p.m. Sign up at the YMCA by calling (307) 674-7488. Direct questions to Luke Gibson. Sponsored by

the YMCA & The Hub.  
• Ladies billiards: Any interested parties please call (307) 672-2240 ext. 107. We'll take a consensus of Fridays or Saturdays, mornings or

afternoons beginning in January. Fridays at 1 p.m., ages 50+, open to all abilities  
• Ukulele class with Lynn Young: Jan. 23 through March 14, Tuesdays at 2:00

p.m. Learn basic chords, tuning and songs. No charge for classes. Limited instruments will be available for use on a temporary basis, courtesy of Q-Man Music.

Instruments available for purchase through Q-Man Music, CB Music or Morris Music in Sheridan. Signups requested.

• Wally Ball: Jan. 23 through March 20, we have scheduled the racquetball courts at the YMCA to play every Tuesday at 9 a.m. and/or Thursdays at 1:30 p.m. if we have interest. Please sign up at the Hub front desk for show of interest in either

day. Question? Call (307) 672-2240 ext. 107. \$1 suggested donation at court time.

• National Kazoo Day: Thursday, Jan. 25th, 12:30 p.m. Share in the fun!  
• The Jane Party lives on. If your first, middle or last name is Jane, we want to add you to our get together on Sunday, Jan'e'uary 27. Details to be announced. Let us know if you are interested at (307) 672-2240 ext. 107.

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### ENTRÉE CHOICE\* or SOUP/SALAD

Tue - Hot Beef Sandwich  
Wed - Italian Pasta Bake  
Thu - Taco Salad; Chips, Mexican Beef, Salsa  
Fri - Chicken Fried Steak  
Sat - Chicken Enchilada  
Sun - Ham Loaf/Pineapple Sauce  
Mon - Dill Enhanced Salmon Filet

\*entrée only offered for Home Delivered Meals

### UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS

Tue - Ukulele Class	2:00 p.m.	Community Room
Wed - YMCA Chess Club	4:00 p.m.	Café at The Hub
Thurs - National Kazoo Day	12:30 to 1:30 p.m.	Café
Fri - Dominoes	9:30 a.m.	Café
Sat - Jeans and Queens Square Dancing	7:00 p.m.	Fitness Room
Mon - French Beading	1:30 p.m.	Art Studio

Lunch Service Hours: 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., 365 days a year at 211 Smith Street Home Delivered Meals (307) 672-6079

Loan Closet, Outreach, and Administration Services, 672-2240. Mondays - Fridays.

Help at Home Services, 675-1978. 232 North Brooks: Mondays - Fridays.

Day Break Adult Care Services, 674-4968. 241 Smith Street: Mondays - Fridays.