

The Arkansas Department of Health is urging the public to get a flu shot when they become available next month as one way to decrease potential hospitalizations amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

The focus on the upcoming flu season comes as the state recorded 735 new coronavirus cases on Thursday, bringing the state's total to 47,028. Of those cases, 6,958 are considered active.

Pulaski county led the state in new cases with 73. Craighead county added 69 new cases, while Sebastian county added 62.

Hospitalizations decreased by two for a total of 514, while the number of patients on a ventilator increased by five for 111.

Speaking during the state's daily briefing on the pandemic, which took place at the Arkansas Department of Health today, (on Thursday) Health Secretary Dr. Jose Romero spoke on the importance of Arkansans getting their flu shot this season as it would drive down the number of flu hospitalizations, freeing up space for more potential COVID-19 cases.

NEWS06**:15****"...the elderly"**

"As we've talked about in the past, our capacity is limited in regard to hospital beds and ICUs and ventilators. So we don't want to add on top of that the burden of an influenza disease, especially in the elderly," Romero said.

Dr. Jennifer Dillaha, Medical Director of Immunizations at the state health department, said only half of Arkansans who are recommended to get a flu vaccine actually get one

The Arkansas Department of Health will host drive-thru flu vaccination clinics beginning the week of September 21.