

Health and Welfare

The flu season is upon us. One of the best strategies to provide protection is getting your annual flu shot.

The viruses responsible for causing most infections in the fall and winter are influenza, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Health officials are encouraging Minnesotans to get an updated COVID-19 vaccine, along with a newly approved RSV vaccine for adults ages 60 and older.

Strategic Healthcare Programs (SHP) named Perham Living Home Health Care a “superior performer” in its Best Home Health List for 2022

Perham Living Home Health Care was one of only two organizations in Minnesota to make the list and were selected because they ranked in the top 20% in patient satisfaction.

Strategic Healthcare Program’s 2022 award recipients were determined by reviewing and ranking the overall satisfaction score for more than 3,200 home health care providers.

In a news release, Jennifer Doll, director of Perham Living Home Health Care, said: “I am extremely proud of our employees for earning this prestigious award. This recognition is a testament to our unwavering commitment to delivering high-quality healthcare services. Patient satisfaction scores are a vital gauge of our organization’s performance and reflect our culture of excellence in patient care.”

Perham Living Home Health Care offers a variety of services in the home, which include: skilled nursing and care management, physical, occupational, and speech therapy, and other personal and health management services.

State health officials say it's too early to tell how many Minnesotans are getting the updated COVID-19 shot this fall. Commissioner Brooke Cunningham says the new vaccine has been slow to arrive in the state:

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[bpmnvaccineslow1.mp3] :14 "more detail"

("So there have been a few supply chain issues and so that's being worked out. Our clinic has vaccine as do other sites. So we need a little bit of time now that those supply chain issues have (been) resolved to really look at the numbers in more detail.")

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She and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan talked about the importance of getting vaccinated at the Community-University Health Care Clinic where Cunningham is a primary care provider.

>>Mayo Clinic Performs First Robot-Assisted Kidney Transplant

(Rochester, MN) -- The Mayo Clinic has performed the first robot-assisted kidney transplant in the state of Minnesota. Earlier this month Pam Panning received a kidney from her daughter after more than six months of preparation by surgeons, including training on using the new surgical robot. Doctors say the procedure uses smaller incisions, reducing the risk of infection and possible hernia development.

Open enrollment at state-run MNSure is now under way (through December 15th) and Minnesotans looking for health insurance for 2024 can now shop-and-compare at MNSure.org. C-E-O Libby Caulum (CAH-lum) says all you need to enter...

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[bwmnsure61.mp3] :14 "THROUGH MNSURE"

..."where you live, who's in your household and the total household income, then you can get an estimate right away of how much money you could save by enrolling through a private plan through MNSure."

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Caulum says MNSure is the only place people can get immediate tax credits to reduce their health insurance premiums -- on average, 562 dollars a month for families. Minnesotans can also find out at MNSure.org whether any household members may be eligible for low-cost or free coverage through MinnesotaCare or Medical Assistance (Minnesota's version of Medicaid).

Winter is coming and with it the icy-cold air that those with chronic pain may feel in their joints and muscles.

U of M Dr. Clarence Shannon says this because, in the winter, you are less likely to be active and outside, and the lack of movement makes the pain appear to be worse.

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[awchronicwypain1.mp3] :08 (LITTLE BIT BETTER)

“So somebody with osteoarthritis, they wake up in the morning, they say ‘oh my god I’m so stiff,’ and as the day goes on they seem to get a little bit better!”

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Shannon says moving is a regular prescription he gives patients, particularly in the winter months, as things like, walking, running, aerobics, and swimming are easy to do in the summer, but fall to the wayside when it gets chilly. He recommends those with chronic pain continue their medical regimen but try to stretch daily and participate in a workout plan.

The holidays can be a stressful time even more so for people in recovery from addiction. Heather Jones with Hazelden Betty Ford says addiction is a disease and relapsing is common:

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[trholidaydrinking1.mp3] :16 "PLAN FOR THOSE"

(It's really important to have a plan going into -- what you're going to do, who you are going to be with. What some of those risk factors might be and just kind of pre-cope with how you might plan for those)

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Jones says having a strong support system is also important. She encourages you to have an open line of communication with family members about your needs and expectations over the holidays.

Mayo announces \$5B expansion of downtown Rochester campus

(Rochester, MN) -- Mayo Clinic says it will embark on a seven-year, five-billion-dollar expansion of its downtown Rochester campus, including five new buildings with 2.4 million square feet of additional space. Governor Tim Walz, in Rochester for the announcement, said to Mayo officials, "You made a conscious effort as you looked elsewhere, where you could go, [but] you said, no, this is the best place. This is where we started. This is where the energy's at. This is where the future lies."

Mayo officials say there will be "neighborhoods" in the new building where patients are treated for their specific conditions without being shuttled between different departments. They say significant construction will begin early next year, with the entire project scheduled to be finished by 2030.

Minnesota Nurses Association union President Mary Turner says, "What's missing from this grand plan is how Mayo plans to improve working conditions and staffing levels to keep nurses at the bedside and improve patient care." In the closing hours of the legislative session last May, lawmakers dropped a measure that would have formed committees including nurses to set staffing levels, after Mayo threatened to send billions of dollars in projects to other states and a number of other Minnesota hospitals also objected.

>>Sen. Smith pressing U-S Postal Service on Amazon deal

(Washington, DC) -- Senator Tina Smith is continuing to press the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) for answers about their deal with Amazon that she says causes harsh working conditions for postal employees. Smith sent a letter to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy one week ago noting how Minnesotans have experienced mail delays and inconsistency for years. Minnesotan postal workers have faced difficult conditions made worse by a volume of Amazon deliveries pushing the system past its capacity. When service is unreliable, Minnesotans can face serious consequences like late payment fees and social security checks, to days without prescription medications. Smith says, "Entering into contracts that the system cannot support is a breach of DeJoy's responsibilities."

Every year between October 15th and December 7th the Medicare open enrollment period begins.

UCare Executive VP Jay Sivasailam [(SIV-Asylum) like soul asylum] says during this time, people can look at their current plan and make some changes.

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[awmedicareend1.mp3] :18 (PRESCRIPTION DRUG PLANS)

“One of those choices could be switching from their standard Medicare plan to something known as a Medicare Advantage plan, they can actually switch back from a Medicare Advantage plan to a traditional Medicare plan, or of course, they can always choose between one of these Medicare Part D Prescription Drug plans.”

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This means if you haven't chosen or switched your plan yet you have until midnight TONIGHT (THURS) to get it in online; anything postmarked December 7th and before will also be accepted.

The Minnesota Department of Health is reporting 179 flu-related hospitalizations in the state since October. Senior epidemiologist Melissa McMahon (MICK'-man) says it seems to be a "more standard" flu pattern this season:

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[bpmnfluyear1.mp3] :12 "the holidays"

("So we have seen...cases are rising. They aren't peaking probably just yet. They're still fairly on the low side. We do tend see flu peak just after the holidays.")

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McMahon says now is a good time to get vaccinated. There have been three flu deaths so far this season.

>>Deadline For MNsure Enrollment Friday Night

(St. Paul, MN) -- Minnesotans who want medical and dental coverage through MNsure in 2024 need to sign up today (Fri). The MNsure Contact Center will be open until 10 pm tonight to help those trying to enroll. Enrollment through MNsure will remain open through January 15th, but coverage obtained after today will not start until February 1st.

>>MDH Wins 5-Year Grant for Sickle Cell Disease Research

(St. Paul, MN) -- The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is the winner of the five-year grant of \$1.625 million from the C-D-C to better understand the impact of sickle cell disease. State Health Commissioner Brooke Cunningham says "the program will help us better understand where people with sickle cell live and where health care providers and resources are located so people receive the best services." On average, every year in Minnesota, 22 babies are born with sickle cell disease, and another 540 are born with sickle cell trait.

>>Minneapolis Awarded \$20 Million for Street Improvements

(Washington, DC) -- The U-S Department of Transportation is awarding Minneapolis a 20-million-dollar grant to build safer roads and streets. Through the Safe Streets and Roads for All grant, Minneapolis will be able to provide upgrades to "end traffic deaths and severe injuries" by 2027. The funding will be used to improve traffic signals, back projects on "high injury" streets, and include protected bikeways and intersections, crosswalk signing and striping, street lighting and mobile speed wagons to enforce speed limits.

>>3 Minnesotans Dead from Cantaloupe Salmonella Outbreak

(Minneapolis, MN) -- A third person in Minnesota is dead and 26 others are ill from a salmonella outbreak linked to contaminated cantaloupe. The C-D-C reported 302 people in 42 states have become sick since November from the cantaloupe, 129 of them hospitalized and four died. Health officials advise not to eat pre-cut cantaloupes from an unknown brand and throw away any recalled pre-cut or whole cantaloupes.

>>Salmonella Concerns Lead to Recall of Quaker Oats Granola Products

(Chicago, IL) -- Quaker Oats is recalling more than 40 different granola bars and granola cereal products due to salmonella concerns. The affected products include various flavors of Quaker Chewy Bars and seven types of Quaker Puffed Granola or Simply Granola Cereals. The Quaker Oats website lists all the products and the use-by dates on the boxes. The products were sold in all 50 states. The company says there have been no confirmed cases of salmonella linked to their products, but it recommends throwing away the products that have been recalled.

>>Fire Contained at Eagan Recycling Plant

(Eagan, MN) — Fire crews contained a large fire at Gopher Resource in Eagan that broke out Sunday morning. Firefighters found the fire between two roofs, with no products inside catching fire. No injuries were reported, and air quality tests showed no concerns. The cause of the fire remains unknown.

A new study from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) shows more Minnesotans could be taking advantage of cardiac rehabilitation treatments to reduce hospitalizations and deaths.

MDH Cardio Clinical Specialist Sara Johnson explains cardiac rehab is typically delivered over 12 weeks, with one-hour sessions, 3 days a week, including:

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[awcardiacrehab1.mp3] :12 (TO THEIR LIFESTYLE)

“Supervised exercise, nutrition counseling and education, stress management, and then the opportunity to connect with folks who are going through a similar situation and adjustments to their lifestyle.”

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Johnson says to begin cardiac rehab, patients must be referred after experiencing a “qualified event,” which could be a heart attack, heart surgery, getting a stent, or other heart problems like heart failure or angina (an-gin-a). The study shows benefits from cardiac rehab could enhance someone’s overall wellbeing, help improve heart function, and reduce risk of future heart events.

>>MSP workers want higher wages, affordable healthcare

(Minneapolis, MN) -- Workers called out employers and airport leaders at MSP today (MON), demanding higher wages and affordable healthcare for themselves and their families. MN Hospitality Union Secretary-Treasurer Sheigh (shay) Freeberg says they've won some battles over the past few decades, such as a \$15 minimum wage and paid sick days, but "multiple surveys, conducted by SEIU [union] within the last few years, have found a 30% of their members have no health insurance." Freeberg notes employees say they're uninsured at a rate three times higher than the national average, and for those who do have healthcare, over 80% say they get it through the government. Freeberg says this means not only are taxpayers subsidizing the airport industry directly, but employees don't reap any of the benefits and are forced into subsidized healthcare.

Record number of Minnesotans sign up for health insurance through MNsure

(St. Paul, MN) -- A record number of Minnesotans -- just under 133 thousand -- have signed up for 2024 health insurance through the MNsure state-run marketplace. C-E-O Libby Caulum (CAH-lum) says that's more than five thousand higher than the previous record set in 2021. "The expanded benefits that were made first available during the pandemic really mean that more Minnesotans can access tax credits, and those tax credits are more generous," she says. Those who missed the December 15th deadline for coverage to begin January 1st have a second chance -- although with a one-month gap in coverage. Minnesotans who sign up by January 15th will have health insurance coverage starting February 1st.

Earned Safe and Sick Time Law Begins January 1st in Minnesota

(St. Paul, MN) -- Earned sick-and-safe time for nearly all workers is the law in Minnesota beginning January 1st. Senate bill sponsor, Saint Paul Democrat Sandy Pappas (PAP-us) says Minnesota learned in the pandemic that employees who are sick need to stay home. She said, "businesses that are especially vulnerable might be restaurants, nursing homes, day care centers -- where you can really spread the illness among a wider population." But Lauryn Schothorst (SHOT-horst) with the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce contends sick-and-safe time is effectively a significant new paid-time-off policy. She argues, "employers don't have much control over understanding who's out when, for what purposes, when they can take legitimate enforcement action against an employee for not showing up to work, and when it's protected under the law."

>>3 More Flu-Related Deaths in Minnesota, Drop in Hospitalizations

(St. Paul, MN) -- The weekly update from the Minnesota Department of Health includes three more flu-related deaths and a total of 14 this season. One-hundred-27 people were hospitalized with influenza the week ending December 23rd, which is down 41 from the previous week. Six Minnesota schools reported flu outbreaks and there were five in long-term care facilities. State health officials say they expect the flu season to peak sometime after the holidays.