

# Flu season in West Virginia mild so far; peak yet to come

By Laura Haight  
Staff writer

Although flu season is well underway, reports of the virus in West Virginia have been low this winter, with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention only reporting sporadic cases in the state.

Dr. Julia Ellison, area medical director for MedExpress in Charleston and Huntington, said flu season has been relatively mild compared to last year. Ellison said the flu vaccine wasn't as effective last year because of a mutation in the flu virus; however, this year the vaccine has been efficient in preventing the flu.

High-risk people, such as the elderly, children, people with lung conditions or pregnant women, should get the flu vaccine. But Ellison adds that healthy people should get the vaccine too, to reduce the chances of spreading the flu to high-risk patients.

Although people can get the flu shot as early as October, Ellison said it may not be too late to get the flu shot this season.

"We haven't hit our peak yet, for sure," Ellison said. "You have two weeks to get immunity. It's kind of a luck of the draw thing — if we don't get the peak within the next few weeks then it's not too late."

Flu season typically peaks January or February, but Ellison said it can peak as late as March.

She said a common misconception about the flu vaccine is that when the vaccine is given, some people experience mild flu-like symptoms that they confuse with the flu itself. For the vaccine to work,



AP file photo

In this 2009 file photo, Walgreen's pharmacy manager, Whitney Workman injects a customer with the seasonal flu vaccine in Columbia, S.C. Flu season in West Virginia has been relatively mild so far, compared to last year.

it activates the immune system which is why some people sometimes experience fatigue or have a fever.

"I think some people have had bad experiences with it in the past or they've heard bad things about the flu vaccine," Ellison said. "You may get mild symptoms and people

misinterpret that as the flu."

Ellison said it also takes two weeks to develop immunity to the flu, so if a patient is exposed to the virus right after they've received the shot, they could get the flu.

Ellison said another misconception about the flu is that people tend to think a

bad cold or stomach virus is the flu.

"Sometimes people do confuse it with a cold," Ellison said. "Sometimes people use the flu interchangeably with GI (gastrointestinal) viruses, but the flu seems to hit people like a truck."

Flu symptoms typically de-

velop quickly, and don't typically consist of vomiting or diarrhea.

Besides getting the vaccine, other ways to reduce your chances of getting the flu are to consistently get a good night's rest, eat healthy food, wash hands frequently and clean surfaces with disinfect-

Some people experience mild flu-like symptoms that they confuse with the flu itself. For the vaccine to work, it activates the immune system which is why some people sometimes experience fatigue or have a fever.

tants, Ellison said. "When people are in close quarters with each other they tend to spread illnesses more frequently," Ellison said. "After holiday get-togethers we see an uptake in viral illnesses."

Symptoms of the flu include body aches, fever up to 103 degrees, coughing, chills, and headache. Symptoms typically appear quickly, whereas symptoms of the common cold take a few days to develop.

"It's much more severe than the common cold," Ellison said.

The flu can be treated with antiviral medication, and people who are high risk should seek antivirals, according to the CDC. Additionally, antiviral medication works best when used within 48 hours of contracting the flu, but can still be effective later during the illness.

Other diseases going around the Charleston area are strep throat, pneumonia, bronchitis and viral upper respiratory infections, Ellis said.

Reach Laura Haight at [laura.haight@wvgazette.com](mailto:laura.haight@wvgazette.com), 304-348-4843 or follow @laurahaight\_ on Twitter.

# Study about empathy in animals may reveal more about autism

Vole study helps pinpoint role of chemicals which could affect psychiatric treatments

By Ariana Eunjung Cha  
The Washington Post

Empathy research is a big topic in neuroscience these days, with a growing number of studies focused on how emotions figure into people's thoughts and actions. One of the main things we've learned is that various non-human species are also able to recognize the distress of others and respond in a comforting way — suggesting that this may be something in the neural wiring of the brain rather than something that is learned.

The latest study on this topic, published in the journal *Science*, involves prairie voles, who are known for having strong family bonds similar to those of humans. Vole mates tend to form lifelong relationships and work together to care for their offspring.

Researchers Larry Young and James Burkett from Emory University ran an experiment that involved separating the vole families and exposing only some of them to mild shocks. When the researchers reunited the voles with their relatives, they found that the voles tried to soothe the ones that were shocked — as these animals do by licking them — longer than those who were not shocked.

Then the researchers ran the experiment again after blocking the animals' receptors for oxytocin, which is thought to play a role in social recognition and maternal behaviors. They found that this stopped the consoling behavior.

"The highly social and monogamous prairie vole greatly increases partner-directed grooming toward familiar conspecifics (but not strangers) that have experienced an unobserved stressor, providing social buffering," the researchers wrote.

The researchers said that breaking down the role of oxytocin in empathy may help us better understand and treat psychiatric disorders, such as

schizophrenia, as well as developmental disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder, that appear to be related to a disruption of a person's ability to detect and respond to the emotions of others.

The researchers suggested that this indicates that oxytocin may improve social engagement in autism.

"Many complex human traits have their roots in fundamental brain processes that are shared among many other species," Young said, according to the publication. "We now have the opportunity to explore in detail the neural mechanisms underlying empathetic responses in a laboratory rodent with clear implications for humans."

Other experts have even more lofty goals for empathy research, and some have even suggested that it could hold the key to our survival.

In a lengthy piece in 2013, the *New Yorker* reported that two recent books — "The Empathic Civilization" (Penguin), by Jeremy Rifkin, and "Humanity on a Tightrope" (Rowman & Littlefield), by Paul R. Ehrlich and Robert E. Ornstein — "make the powerful argument that empathy has been the main driver of human progress, and that we need more of it if our species is to survive."

Ehrlich and Ornstein want us "to emotionally join a global family." Rifkin calls for us to make the leap to "global empathic consciousness." He sees this as the last best hope for saving the world from environmental destruction, and concludes with the plaintive question, "Can we reach biosphere consciousness and global empathy in time to avoid planetary collapse?" These are sophisticated books, which provide extensive and accessible reviews of the scholarly literature on empathy.

And, as befits the spirit of the times, they enthusiastically champion an increase in empathy as a cure for humanity's ills.



AP file photo

A pair of voles with their offspring at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center at Emory University in Atlanta.

To subscribe, 304-348-4800

---

**Mountain State School of Massage**

Celebrating 21 years as the State's First Massage Therapy program 1995-2016

**Thinking of going back to school?**

**Think Mountain State School of Massage!**

Federal Financial Aid, Grants and Scholarships are available for those who qualify.

CALL TODAY  
304-926-8822

Register Now for the next Massage Therapy Program.

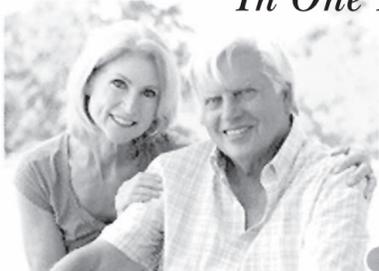
- Evening Program Starts: April 4, 2016
- Day Program Starts: April 18, 2016




LEARN MORE!  
[www.mtnstmassage.com](http://www.mtnstmassage.com)  
**Or Call: 304-926-8822**  
601 50th St. SE, Charleston, WV

## Implant Supported Teeth

In One Day!



*Simpson*  
**DENTAL ASSOCIATES**  
*See the difference.*

- Advancement in Technology
- Implant Design
- State of the Art Facility
- Highly Skilled Staff
- In House Dental Lab

Dr. Mark W. Simpson  
Dr. Christen K. Simpson

304-342-6162

\*Requirements: Adequate bone, a full arch of teeth, & stable health.

wvsmiles.com