

Flu vaccine expected to be better this year

By Victoria Colliver, San Francisco Chronicle

Federal health officials are urging Americans to start getting their influenza shots and emphasized that, unlike last year, this year's vaccine appears to be a good match with the strains of flu they expect to hit the U.S.

More than 170 million doses of the vaccine are being produced, 40 million of which have already been distributed to doctors' offices and pharmacies. No shortages are predicted.

Global and national health experts hope to avoid a repeat of last year's debacle when the predominant strain of flu – a variation of Type A, subtype H3N2 – had mutated from what scientists initially thought it would be. By that time, it was too late to create a new vaccine, which takes about six months to develop. By the time a new vaccine would have been created and distributed, the flu season, which generally runs from December through early spring, would have already begun.

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