

## LOCAL

## Seniors must file taxes to receive stimulus rebates

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Attention all senior citizens and low-income earners: you must file your 2007 taxes to receive a stimulus check in May.

The federal government is offering free money to more than 130 million individuals in an attempt to bolster the economy. Stimulus payments of no less than \$300 and no more than \$600 will be sent to qualifying individuals; payments of no less than \$600 and no more than \$1,200 will be sent to qualifying couples, filing joint returns. Couples with children will receive an extra \$300 per child (under age 17).

But in order to receive it, citizens, who have a "qualifying" earned income of at least \$3,000 but may not be required to file, must file their 2007 taxes. According to the IRS, qualifying

income is considered to be "earned income such as wages and net self-employment income as well as Social Security or certain Railroad Retirement benefits and veterans' disability compensation, pension or survivors' benefits received from the Department of Veterans' Affairs in 2007."

Qualifying income does not include amounts received through Supplemental Security Income; dividends, interest and capital gains income; and non-veterans or non-Social Security pension income such as from Individual Retirement Accounts. Those who can be claimed as a dependent on someone else's return are not eligible to receive a stimulus payment. Taxpayers must have a valid Social Security Number to qualify for a stimulus rebate.

According to the IRS, "people with no filing requirement who turn in a tax return to qualify

for the economic stimulus payment will not get a tax bill. People in this category will not owe money because of the stimulus payment."

Checks will be mailed throughout a 10-week period beginning in May. Tax filers who have selected to receive their refunds through direct deposit, may receive stimulus payments directly deposited into their accounts as early as April. All stimulus payments will be calculated and issued through the IRS and will be based on an individual's filing status, income and net tax liability. In most cases, the payment will equal the tax liability on a person's return (between \$300-600).

"The amount of your rebate depends on how much money you earn this year and information from the 2007 tax return you'll file before April 15," said Amy McAnarney, executive

director for H&R Block's Tax Institute. She also said that the stimulus rebates will not be considered income, filers will not be taxed on the rebates next year and it will not reduce the amount of an individual's refund next year. "The rebate is an advanced credit for tax year 2008, based on a tax cut in the economic stimulus bill."

"Small business owners can write off an additional 50 percent of new investment expenses in 2008 for items that had been subject to depreciation over 20 years or less," McAnarney said. "Another break gives business owners with less than \$800,000 in investments the ability to write off the total cost of new investment expenses of as much as \$250,000."

Free tax aide is offered to seniors age 55 and older at the Patrick Center from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. on February 26 and March

25. For more information, call 704-734-0447.

Low and moderate-income workers, including veterans, can get free tax help through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. To find the nearest VITA site, call 1-888-227-7669. Taxpayers who are 50 or younger and who earned less than \$54,000 in 2007 are eligible for free tax preparation through H&R Block's Free File Alliance program at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

Eugene Hart & Associates, 2767 E. Cherokee Avenue, across the state line near Grover, is offering free tax aide to all seniors and others who may need to file to get a rebate. Stop by the office or call 864-839-3910.

Check with your tax consultant to see if you could qualify for free filing to receive stimulus rebates.

## Flu sweeps through area, claims hospital beds

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It's an epidemic! The flu has spread through the region, state and country like a wildfire, leaving hospitals scrounging for room and ambulances looking for an open bed.

Doctors and health care professionals have seen an outbreak in the number of flu cases across the region over the past couple of weeks. Nurses have also seen a rise in illnesses within the schools.

"A lot of kids have been sick," said KMHS Health Nurse Jacquie Burr. But the schools are not equipped to test whether the illness is the flu or something else.

Burr said that when she sees a student exhibiting symptoms of the flu, she sends them home and encourages them to visit their doctor or the Kings Mountain Hospital Emergency Room where they can be tested for the flu.

Kings Mountain High and Intermediate schools have seen a rise in the number of sick children over the past two weeks. West Elementary Principal Brian Hunnell said that they also have seen cases of influenza among staff and students. "It's starting to spread," he said.

"The flu hit our area about

two weeks ago," said Dana McNeilly, the School Health Supervisor for the Cleveland County Health Department.

"It is widespread all over the country," said Vice President Dotty Leatherwood with Cleveland Regional Medical Center, in Shelby. According to the CDC's website, which Leatherwood said they continuously check, there are only five states now that are not indicated as having widespread influenza cases.

"We've had significant increases at both hospitals at Kings Mountain and Cleveland Regional," she said. Leatherwood added that she has heard some local doctors and emergency rooms say they have set records recently with the number of visits.

Dr. Jeff Carley, of Carley Family Care in Kings Mountain, has absorbed a lot of those visits. "We're seeing a lot of flu right now," he said on Tuesday. "This morning, the hospital was almost out of beds. Two weeks ago it really hit hard and we had patients in the Emergency Room. We're all strapped for beds."

He added that a lot of other hospitals have had to go on diversion lately, meaning they've had to redirect patients to other hospitals as their beds fill up. But with the increase of

patient diversions coupled with a flu epidemic, some are having to fight off the flu in their own beds.

If you got a flu shot in October would it still fight off the flu now?

"Usually it's still effective," Dr. Carley said.

"If a person gets it in late October or November it should carry them through the flu season," McNeilly said.

Dr. Carley said that he hasn't seen many cases of patients, this year, coming down with the full-blown flu after receiving a vaccination. "The sickest people that I've seen, all of them have not had a flu shot," he said.

But Leatherwood said the hospitals have seen folks, this year, coming down with the flu after receiving the vaccination. "This particular influenza that's going around is not in the flu shot," she said. "It's effective against other flu (strains), but not this one."

McNeilly said that the vaccination usually covers several strains determined very early before the flu season hits. "Unfortunately there's always a few little strains lurking around that we're not protected against. But the vaccine can still help your body fight it a little better," she said, even if it doesn't protect against that certain strain.

The classic symptoms of the flu include: high fever, shaking chills and body aches. Then, the virus almost immediately goes straight to the chest. The best thing to do when you first experience symptoms, Dr. Carley said, is to see your doctor. An antiviral medicine is available for patients within 48 hours of flu onset. "It can help shorten the severity and the duration of the flu," he said.

Dr. Carley said that they are currently out of flu vaccines as are many places. "If somebody in your family has the flu you're probably already exposed to it," he said. But, without the flu shot, washing your hands is a good line of defense against this "highly contagious" virus.

Flu outbreaks generally seem to last about six weeks, Dr. Carley said. "But you never can tell."

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