

Influenza Fact Sheet for Home

Influenza

The flu is a contagious illness caused by influenza viruses. Influenza is a highly contagious viral infection that affects mainly the nose, throat, chest and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

Symptoms of Influenza

The symptoms of influenza include:

- Fever (typically =100° F)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults.

Emergency Warning Signs of Influenza

In **children**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

Infectious Period

People may be able to infect each other one day before symptoms occur and up to 10 days after being sick.

What can you do to prevent or reduce the spread of influenza in your home?

- **Get vaccinated!** The influenza vaccine is the BEST way to prevent influenza infection.
- **Stay home when ill.** Any family member suspected of having the influenza should not attend work or school. Ill family members should be encouraged to rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- **Wash hands often.** Wash hands frequently by using soap and warm water and rub your hands for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC's). Dry hands with as clean a towel as possible. Towels should be changed frequently. Young children should be instructed and assisted to make sure they wash their hands properly. Bathrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and towels are available for your family's use.
- **Cover coughs and sneezes.** Influenza can be spread by coughs or sneezes. Family members should cover their mouths using their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a disposable tissue when sneezing or blowing their noses. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and then hands should be washed. (If you cannot wash hands, rub hands with an alcohol hand gel.) Make sure tissues are available in the home and cars for runny noses and sneezing.
- **Avoid close contact.** Spread of the influenza in homes is likely. Families should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, toothbrushes, etc.

- **Clean surfaces frequently.** Clean surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, kitchen table, and phones frequently with household cleaner or bleach solution. (Mixing ¼ cup bleach with 1 gallon of water makes a bleach solution. This should be mixed fresh daily.) If disinfectant is not available hot water and soap can be used.
- **If ill, consult a health care provider.** If family members get influenza, especially if they are elderly or have other medical problems, you may wish to contact their physicians immediately. Their doctors can prescribe antiviral drugs, which may stop them from getting seriously ill. However the medications must be given within 48 hours of the onset of illness. The medication may also be given to household contacts to prevent them from becoming ill. People with high risk conditions (listed below) are more likely to be hospitalized or die from the flu and prompt treatment may help prevent or lessen the disease.

Vaccination

Yearly flu vaccination should begin early in the fall and will provide protection for the entire flu season.

Who should get vaccinated?

In general, anyone who wants to reduce the chances of getting the flu should be vaccinated. However, certain people should get vaccinated each year either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for high risk person. During flu seasons when vaccination supplies are limited or delayed, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) makes recommendations regarding priority groups for vaccination.

People who fall into high risk categories for influenza complications and transmission include:

- Children aged six months up to 19 years of age
- Pregnant women
- People 50 years of age and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People who live with or care for persons at high risk for complications from flu, including:
 - Health care workers
 - Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
 - Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than six months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

The Nasal Spray Vaccine

Vaccination with the nasal spray flu vaccine (FluMist®) is an option for healthy people 2-49 years of age who are not pregnant, even healthy persons who live or care for those in a high risk group. Some people should not be vaccinated with the nasal spray flu vaccine, including those with chronic health conditions, for the full list visit: www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/nasalspray.htm.

Why you should get the flu vaccine every year

The influenza virus changes every year as it makes its way around the world. Public health providers and people who make flu vaccines decide each year which kinds of flu are most likely to make people sick. They put the top three or four kinds into the vaccine, the number depending upon the particular vaccine. Since viruses are almost never the same from year to year, the kinds of influenza in the vaccine changes each year. The vaccine only protects you from influenza for one year.