



FACTS ABOUT INFLUENZA

What is influenza?

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Influenza can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting an influenza vaccination each year.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

- Fever (usually high)
- 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.

What are possible complications of influenza?

Complications of flu can include pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza viruses spread when a person with the flu coughs or sneezes and the virus moves through the air and is inhaled by another person. It can also spread when a person touches a surface that has influenza virus on it and then touches his or her mouth, eyes, or nose. An infected individual can spread the virus 1 day before the symptoms begin up to 5 days after becoming ill.

Who is at risk for influenza?

Everyone is at risk for influenza. However, infants and children under 5 years of age, people over 50, pregnant women, and people with chronic health problems are at increased risk for serious complications from the flu.

How is influenza treated?

People with the flu should drink plenty of fluids, rest and avoid alcohol and tobacco. Over-the-counter medications, when used as directed, may lessen fever, headache and muscle aches. Aspirin should not be used for infants, children or teenagers because they may be at risk for contracting Reye Syndrome following an influenza infection. Antiviral medications may be prescribed for people who have severe symptoms or are at risk for a serious infection. The treatment must begin within the first two days of symptoms and can shorten the course and severity of illness.



How is the spread of influenza reduced?

1. The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each year.
2. Careful, frequent handwashing for 20 seconds with warm, soapy water
3. Avoid close contact with people who are sick
4. Avoid touching the eyes, mouth, or nose
5. When coughing or sneezing, cover mouth and nose with tissue and dispose of it in a sanitary manner. If tissues are unavailable, cough or sneeze into the sleeve of your arm.
6. Clean and sanitize frequently touched surfaces through-out the day

What do I need to know about influenza vaccines?

There are two types of vaccines:

- The "flu shot" – an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle. The flu shot is approved for use in people 6 months of age and older, including healthy people, pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine – a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV for "Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine"). LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 2 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection. Flu vaccines will not protect against flu-like illnesses caused by non-influenza viruses.

October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but getting vaccinated in December or even later can still be beneficial since most influenza activity occurs in January or later in most years. Though it varies, flu season can last as late as May.

Who should get an influenza vaccine?

1. All children 6 months through 18 years of age
2. Anyone 50 years of age or older
3. Women who will be pregnant during influenza season
4. Anyone with long-term health problems
5. Anyone with a weakened immune system
6. Anyone with certain muscle or nerve disorders that can lead to breathing or swallowing problems
7. Anyone 6 months through 18 years of age on long term aspirin treatment
8. Household contacts or caregivers of high risk people
9. Healthcare providers
10. People living in dormitories, correctional facilities or under other crowded conditions
11. People who travel
12. Anyone who wants to avoid becoming ill with influenza