



# Prevention

newsletter ...for the health and well-being of you and your family.

Though influenza can appear at any time, the typical flu season in the United States is during winter, with peak flu activity between November and March. Each season is unique, but each year, anywhere from 5 to 20 percent of the U.S. population gets the flu. Around 200,000 people are hospitalized due to its complications, and another 36,000 die from it. Yet, some myths still remain about its origination and transmission. It is important to be correctly informed about the disease in order to remain healthy during the flu season.

## Facts About the Flu

The flu is an infection of the respiratory tract caused by the influenza virus. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can cause complications leading to death.

### Symptoms of the Flu

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever or chills
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Cough and/ or sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Stomach ailments such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (this is more common in children than adults)

### How the Flu is Spread

The flu is spread primarily through germs when coughing, sneezing or talking close to others. It also can be spread if an individual touches a surface that was touched by an infected person, and then touches his or her own mouth, eyes or nose. People are typically contagious beginning one day before symptoms start and up to five to seven days after symptoms appear.

### If Bitten by the Flu Bug

If you contract the flu, it is important to take good care of yourself. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends:

- Stay home from work! It's your best chance for recovery, and you will avoid spreading the disease to others.
- Get lots of sleep.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Take over-the-counter (OTC) medications appropriate for your symptoms.
- Most people do not need medical care, but consult your doctor if you are concerned. Also, seek immediate medical attention if you have any of the warning signs discussed on the next page.

### Prevention

It is possible for serious complications to arise from the flu, including bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions. This is why it is crucial to do all you can to prevent the virus from attacking you in the first place.

These simple steps should be taken in order to avoid the flu:

- **Get a yearly flu vaccine.** It is the most important step in protecting against the disease.
- **Take preventive actions.** Cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough. Try to avoid close contact with sick people and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Wash your hands often or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Take antiviral drugs** if your doctor recommends them. These are prescription drugs that fight the flu by keeping the viruses from reproducing in your body.
- **Maintain a healthy immune system** by not smoking, eating healthy food, exercising, taking a daily multivitamin, getting adequate sleep and controlling your stress level.

## Flu Vaccination

In 2010, the CDC changed their recommendation regarding flu vaccination – previously they had suggested that children and high-risk individuals get vaccinated. Now the official CDC recommendation is that everyone 6 months of age and older get a yearly flu vaccine. Vaccination is especially important if you are at high risk for serious flu complications, such as young children, pregnant women, people with chronic medical conditions, and people 65 years and older.

The 2012-2013 seasonal flu vaccine will vaccinate against multiple strains of influenza, including H1N1. Thus, only one flu shot is needed to protect against both seasonal and H1N1 flu this year. The vaccine is available in a shot or a nasal spray.

Contrary to popular belief, you cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine – but sometimes side effects mimic those of the flu, such as a headache, low fever and/or runny nose. These will only persist for a day or less, however.

Certain people should NOT get a flu vaccine without first consulting their physician, including:

- Those with a severe allergy to chicken eggs
- Those who have had a severe reaction or have developed Guillain-Barre syndrome within six weeks of getting an influenza vaccination
- Children less than 6 months of age

## Emergency Situations

Occasionally, the flu can cause serious medical complications. It is important to seek immediate medical treatment if someone with the flu displays any of these signs.

In children, emergency warning signs include:

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

In adults, emergency warning signs are:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough

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