



Influenza and You— What You Need to Know

Is it a cold or the flu?

Colds usually start two to three days after exposure to the virus and last two to seven days. Symptoms may include a scratchy, sore throat, sneezing, runny nose, and a mild cough. Fever is generally mild in older children and adults. Infants and young children may run higher fevers. *The flu* causes a sudden headache, dry cough, muscle ache, extreme fatigue, and high fever. Most people feel better in a few days, but the fatigue and cough can last for up to two weeks or more.

How can I prevent the flu from spreading?

- Practice good hand washing.
- Teach children to cough into their elbow and away from people.
- Wipe noses with clean disposable tissues, dispose of them properly and wash your hands.
- Don't share food, bottles, toothbrushes or toys that can be put in the mouth.
- Play outdoors often. Let fresh air into your program daily.

What should I do for a flu victim?

Provide lots of fluids and rest. Medicine for muscle aches and cough may be purchased over the counter. If someone is in a high-risk group, continues to have high fever for more than a few days, or thinks they are getting pneumonia (worsening cough, pain in chest, continued fever, shortness of breath) then they should contact their health care provider immediately.

The flu vaccine

The flu vaccine provides slightly different protection every year because the flu virus mutates or

changes frequently. Vaccination against the flu is recommended from October through early November. After receiving the vaccine it takes a couple of weeks to develop protective immunity from the flu virus. This protection lasts for about three to four months or through the worst part of the flu season, which is November through March or April, with peak occurrence in February. It's unusual to get the flu more than once a year.

Who needs the flu vaccine?

You do. The influenza vaccination is recommended for all adults in the child care setting. By protecting yourself you are also protecting those around you. Any child six months of age or older can be vaccinated against the flu as well.

People at high risk of severe illness are especially encouraged to get the flu vaccine. This includes:

- adults 65 or older (even if they're in good health);
- children 6 to 23 months old (this group has the highest rate of hospitalization with the flu);
- adults and children with chronic health conditions like asthma, heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, cancer and HIV/AIDS; and
- women who are more than three months pregnant during the flu season (typically November through March).

Where can I get the flu vaccine?

From your health care provider or the Public Health Department.

Flu Fact or Myth?

“The flu is just like a bad cold.” False.

The flu is far more serious than a bad cold. It’s a disease of the lungs, and it can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 114,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 20,000 people (mostly over 65) die as a result of having the flu. Children under two years of age are as likely as those over 65 to have to go to the hospital because of the flu.

“The flu shot can give you the flu.” False.

Flu vaccines are made from killed flu viruses. These cannot give you the flu.

“Even if I get the flu shot, I can still get the flu.” Only partly true.

This can happen, but the flu shot protects most people from the flu. The flu shot will not protect you from other viruses that can cause illnesses that sometimes feel like the flu.

“The vaccine isn’t 100 percent effective, so I’m better off getting the flu.” False.

No vaccine is 100 percent effective. But if you get a flu shot and still get the flu, you are likely to be far less sick than if you had not received the flu shot.

“The side effects of the flu shot are worse than the flu.” False.

The worst side effect you’re likely to get is a sore arm. The risk of a rare allergic reaction is far less than the risk of severe complications from influenza.

“Not everyone can get a flu shot.” True.

If you are allergic to eggs (which are used in making the vaccine), are ill with a high fever, or have had a severe reaction to the flu vaccine in the past, you might not be able to get the vaccine.

“Only the very old and the very sick need a flu shot.” False.

Adults and children who are in good health need a flu shot to stay healthy and avoid exposing someone who is more at risk because of their age (very young or very old), a medical condition, pregnancy, or weakened immune system.

“December is too late to get a flu shot.” False.

The flu shot can be given before or during the flu season. The optimal time to get a flu shot is October or November, but a flu shot in December or later will still protect you against flu outbreaks.

Resources

For more information on the flu or the vaccine, call the Healthline at (800) 333-3212 or check these sites:

www.cdc.gov/nip/flu

www.immunize.org/vis/2flu.pdf (flyer in English)

www.immunize.org/vis/spflu02.pdf (flyer in Spanish)

Reference

Portions of this article were adapted from *Flu Facts for Everyone*, a fact sheet by the Centers for Disease Control.

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