

Fact Sheet

Influenza

Recommendations for Long-Term Care Facilities

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.

Infectious Period

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

Prevention of Influenza

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get the vaccination each year. 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 six months of age and older, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions. A higher dose formulation is available for people 65 and older.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine- a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu sometimes called LAIV (FluMist®) for “Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine”. LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 2-49 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.

Uses of vaccination and antiviral medication to prevent and treat influenza

- **Who should be vaccinated?** Employees of nursing homes and long-term care facilities who have direct patient/resident contact and residents should be vaccinated against influenza.
- **What are influenza antiviral drugs?** Influenza antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pill, liquid, and inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in people. Antiviral drugs can make influenza illness milder and make people feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. This could be especially important for people at high risk.
- **How antiviral medications are used for the flu.** Receiving a flu vaccine each year is the best way to protect people from the flu; antiviral drugs can be used as a second line of defense to treat the flu or to prevent flu infection. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within two days of symptoms). When used this way, these drugs can reduce the severity of flu symptoms and shorten the time people are sick by one or two days. They also may make people less contagious to other people.
- **How effective are antiviral drugs?** When used to prevent the flu, antiviral drugs are about 70% to 90% effective. It’s important to remember that flu antiviral drugs are not a substitute for getting a flu vaccine. Antiviral medication is only effective if taken within 48 hours of symptom onset.
- **Antiviral medications approved for influenza.**
For seasonal guidelines about the use of antiviral medications, visit: www.cdc.gov/flu/antivirals/index.htm.

Actions to take to prevent or reduce the spread of influenza in your facility

- **Cover coughs and sneezes.** Transmission commonly occurs from unprotected coughs or sneezes. Make sure tissues are available at all times. Encourage residents and staff to cover their mouths when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their nose. Tissues should be disposed of immediately, followed by proper hand washing (alcohol hand gels may be used).
- **Stay home when ill.** Any staff member suspected of having influenza should be sent home and stay home for the duration of the illness.
- **Use standard and droplet precautions.** Staff should use Standard and Droplet Precautions when caring for clients with influenza.

- **Practice good hand hygiene.** Staff and residents should be encouraged to practice good hand hygiene at all times. This means using warm water and soap for at least 15-20 seconds each time. Alcohol hand gels may be used if hands are not soiled.
- **Clean frequently.** Common use surfaces such as door handles, handrails, game table surfaces, and phones should be cleaned regularly (approximately twice daily) with disinfectant. (Bleach solutions or commercial disinfectants are appropriate.)
- **Isolate ill residents.** Ill residents should stay in their rooms. Non-ill roommates should be relocated to other rooms. If many residents are ill, cohorting to a specific area or ward may be considered. If cohorting of residents is practiced, staff should be cohorted also, i.e., those staff caring for ill residents should not also care for the well residents.
- **Screen for illness in visitors.** Family members and other visitors with respiratory illness should not be allowed into the facility.

Why you should get the flu vaccine every year

The influenza virus changes every year as it makes its way around the world. Since the exact flu viruses are almost never the same from year to year, the strains of influenza in the vaccine changes each year. This is why people need to get a new flu vaccine every year. The vaccine only protects people from influenza for one year.

Vaccination

Yearly flu vaccination should begin as soon as the vaccine is available, usually early in the fall. This will provide protection for the entire flu season.

Who should get vaccinated?

Yearly flu vaccination is recommended for almost everyone over 6 months of age, and is especially important for those people at high risk for developing flu-related complications, such as children younger than five; adults 65 years of age and older; pregnant women; and people with certain medical conditions like heart and lung problems, and diabetes.

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 and healthy persons who live with or care for those in a high risk group. The one exception is healthy persons who care for persons with severely weakened immune systems that require a protected environment; these healthy persons should get the inactivated vaccine.