

Fact Sheet

Influenza

Recommendations for the 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 $\geq 100^{\circ}$ 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.
- **Use hand sanitizer.** Encourage the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hand washing is not possible. Hand sanitizer is effective in killing germs on hands when they are not visibly soiled. Appropriate times to use hand sanitizer are after coughing, sneezing, eating or contact with infected surfaces (e.g., contact with phone, child's nose, and doorknob).
- **Avoid close contact.** Spread of 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.

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 you need to get a new flu vaccine every year. The vaccine only protects you 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.