

Seasonal Influenza Fact Sheet

Influenza is a viral infection of the lungs and airways that is also known as “the flu”

Anyone can get influenza. Influenza is spread from person to person by coughing and sneezing. It may also be spread by direct contact with infected people or contaminated objects like door handles or computer keyboards. Influenza can be a serious disease that causes severe complications such as pneumonia. It can also make heart disease or chronic lung disease worse. In the United States, it is estimated that about 36,000 deaths are caused by influenza each year.

Symptoms of influenza might be confused with the common cold

Influenza and the common cold both have symptoms that affect the throat and nose, but influenza symptoms are usually more severe than cold symptoms. These symptoms include:

- Fever (over 100°F)
- Vomiting
- Chills
- Cough
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue or tiredness
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Stuffy or runny nose

Symptoms usually start 1 to 3 days after being exposed to the influenza virus. Most persons feel better after several days but cough and tiredness may last two weeks or more.

There are ways to treat influenza

For the quickest recovery from influenza, get plenty of rest; drink fluids like juice, water, or hot tea; and consider a fever-reducing medication, such as acetaminophen (but **do not** give aspirin or aspirin-containing products to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms – including fever). **Do not** give any medication including over-the-counter remedies to a child without first consulting with your pediatrician. If a fever lasts more than 3 or 4 days, see your healthcare provider. A physician may also prescribe certain antiviral medications. These medications may make symptoms milder if taken within 1 to 2 days of when symptoms begin. However, antiviral medication should be limited to those at higher risk for complications.

Look out for emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention. If you see these warning signs, seek medical care immediately, either by calling your healthcare provider or going to an emergency room. When you arrive, tell the receptionist or nurse about your symptoms. You may be asked to wear a mask and/or sit in a separate area to protect others from getting sick:

In children:

- High or prolonged fever
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids (dehydration)
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions
- Changes in mental status, such as not easily waking up or not interacting; or seizures

In adults:

- High or prolonged fever
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions
- Confusion

Yearly vaccination is the most important way to prevent influenza

Everyone 6 months of age and older should get vaccinated at the beginning of every influenza season. Getting vaccinated is especially important for people at higher risk of complications from influenza, as well as those who work or live with people at high risk. People with certain medical conditions should consult a physician before getting vaccinated. The best time to get the influenza vaccine is as soon as it is available, but any time during the influenza season is still a good time to get vaccinated. It takes about 2 weeks after vaccination to develop protection against the influenza virus. Past infection with influenza or immunization with the influenza vaccine does not necessarily protect a person from getting influenza the next year because influenza strains often change from one season to the next.

People for whom influenza vaccination is especially important include:

- Those at higher risk of complications from influenza, including:
 - Children aged 6 months to 5 years
 - Pregnant women
 - People 65 years of age and older
 - People of any age with certain acute or chronic medical conditions, including immunosuppression
- Those who might transmit influenza to the vulnerable people listed above should strongly consider vaccination, including:
 - Health care personnel (including emergency medical personnel)
 - Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
 - Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (because these children are too young to be vaccinated)
 - Household contacts and out of home caregivers of adults 50 years of age and older
 - People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities

There are some people who should not be vaccinated without first consulting a physician. These include:

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs or a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination
- People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination
- People who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine
- Children less than 6 months of age (influenza vaccine is not approved for this age group)
- People who have a moderate-to-severe illness with a fever (they should wait until they are recovered to get vaccinated)

Influenza vaccine may rarely cause serious side effects in some people

Different side effects can be associated with the flu shot and the nasal-spray vaccine (LAIV).

The flu shot: The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that could occur are

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Fever (low grade)
- Aches

If these problems occur, they begin soon after the shot and usually last 1 to 2 days. People who receive influenza vaccine rarely have any serious problems from it. However, some serious problems can occur, such as severe allergic reactions.

LAIV (FluMist®): The viruses in the nasal-spray vaccine are weakened and do not cause severe symptoms often associated with influenza illness. (In clinical studies, transmission of vaccine viruses to close contacts has occurred only rarely.)

Side effects from LAIV (FluMist®) can include:

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| ▪ fever | ▪ runny nose | ▪ vomiting |
| ▪ cough | ▪ wheezing | ▪ headache |
| ▪ sore throat | ▪ muscle aches | |

MORE INFORMATION ON FLU VACCINATION CAN BE FOUND AT <http://cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/index.htm>

In addition to vaccination, there are everyday steps you can take to protect your health and if you are sick, to prevent spreading influenza to others:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If tissues are not available, cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.