

FLU - ARE YOU AT RISK?

Influenza (flu) is an acute infectious disease caused by various strains of viruses. Outbreaks of the flu usually occur during the winter because the viruses are most easily spread in crowded, indoor places. The viruses are transmitted by direct contact or by breathing the airborne viruses.

Flu symptoms often start suddenly - high fever, chills, headache, muscular ache, sore throat, dry cough, stuffy or runny nose. Diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting can also occur.



Flu shots (injections) are made from inactivated (killed) virus grown in eggs. You cannot get the flu from flu vaccinations.

Persons vaccinated develop antibodies, which protect them from catching the flu. Temporary and mild reactions include fever, fatigue, and muscular pain.

Who Needs Flu Vaccinations?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone aged 6 months of age and older should receive flu vaccinations annually, with rare exception. If you are uncertain if this applies to you, please consult your health care provider.

Caution: People who are **severely** allergic to eggs should **not** receive flu vaccinations

When to Get Vaccination and How Often?

Because the flu virus changes from year to year, it is necessary to receive vaccination every year. Vaccination should begin as soon as the flu vaccine becomes available.

The flu season can start as early as October and last through May. Seasonal flu activity usually peaks in January and February. Persons who are ill and have a fever should delay vaccination until completely well.

Treatment

Antiviral drugs, given with 1-2 days of the onset of the flu, can shorten the length and severity of the illness. Otherwise, there is no specific treatment for the flu. Over the counter medications can be taken to relieve flu symptoms. In most cases, an attack of the flu is usually over in a week. If bacterial infection such as bronchitis or pneumonia sets in, the use of antibiotics will be required. Here are some suggestions to help minimize your discomforts when you have the flu:

1. Get plenty of rest.
2. Drink lots of fluids to loosen phlegm and prevent dehydration.
3. Use a vaporizer to ease congestion.
4. Take aspirin or acetaminophen to reduce fever, muscle ache, and headache.
5. Aspirin-containing medicines should **not** be given to children or teenagers who may have the flu because of the possibility of developing Reye's syndrome (a rare but dangerous disease affecting the brain and liver).
6. Avoid tobacco and alcohol.

If you would like additional information about flu shots, ask your doctor or contact the local health department.