

# HANDS-ON Health

Health Wave Newsletter, November 2008

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## Influenza Prevention

Late fall and winter time is the "Flu-Season," when colds, sniffles, and sneezing make life miserable for a few days or a week, and may prompt visits to the physician or emergency room for relief. Most of these colds are caused by common viruses and not influenza viruses, which can be more troublesome, longer-lasting and threatening than common cold viruses.

### Flu Facts:

- **Seasonal influenza**—or flu—like the common cold, **is a respiratory infection caused by viruses**. But the flu differs in several ways from the common cold. For example, people with colds rarely get fevers or headaches or suffer from the extreme exhaustion that flu viruses cause. The most familiar aspect of the flu is the way it can 'knock you off your feet' as it sweeps through entire communities (See *Cold/Flu comparison chart on the next page*)

Although flu epidemics happen every year, the beginning, severity, and length of the epidemic depends on many factors, including the different types and strains of influenza viruses circulating and whether the viruses in the vaccine match flu viruses that are circulating.

- Each year, according to CDC, an average of **5% to 20% of the U.S. population gets the flu**. More than **200,000 people are hospitalized** from flu complications. There are about **36,000 flu-related deaths** each year.
- Flu is **spread through coughing or sneezing**. You can also get the flu simply by **touching a surface like a**



**telephone or door knob that has been contaminated by a touch from someone who has the flu**. The viruses can **pass through the air and enter your body through your nose or mouth**. If you've touched a contaminated surface, they can **pass from your hand to your nose or mouth**.

You are at **greatest risk** of getting infected in highly populated areas, such as in **crowded living conditions and in schools**.

- Most people **recover from the flu within one to two weeks**. But some develop serious complications such as pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions

### In This Newsletter:

#### Influenza Prevention

Acquaint yourself with the facts about "flu-season" and learn the latest CDC recommendations for vaccinations. (see **pages 1-4**) Is it a cold or the flu? (see **page 2**) Check out the simple preventive actions you can take. (see **page 4**) Print out, distribute and/or post the attached CDC 'Take 3 Steps' poster. (see **page 5**)

such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

Some individuals—particularly **elderly people, young children, and people with chronic medical conditions**—are at higher risk for flu-related complications. Vaccination of these groups and of health care personnel is critical.

- Although some people get a mild fever, body aches, and fatigue for a few days, **you can't get the flu from a flu shot**. Soreness at the injection site is a common side effect of the flu shot.



## Is It A Cold or the Flu?



Symptoms	COLD	FLU
Fever	Rare	High for 3 to 4 Days
Headache	Rare	Prominent
Aches, Pains	Mild	Severe for Weeks
Fatigue, Weakness	Mild	Can last up to 2-3 weeks
Extreme Exhaustion	Never	Early and Severe
Stuffiness	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usually	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest Discomfort, Cough	Mild to moderate; Hacking cough	Common; can become Severe
Complications	Sinus congestion or earache	Bronchitis, Pneumonia, Can be Life-Threatening
Prevention	None	Annual Flu Vaccine, Anti-Viral Medicines (see your doctor)
Treatment	Only temporary relief of symptoms	Anti-Viral Medicines (see your doctor)

Source: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, NIH

# Vaccination Is The Key Component Of Influenza Prevention

CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease. While there are many different flu viruses, the flu vaccine is designed to protect against the three main flu strains that research indicates will cause the most illness during the flu season. The vaccine can protect you from getting sick from these three viruses or it can make your illness milder if you get a different flu virus.

"One of the biggest challenges in the fight against influenza is producing new vaccines every year," says Jesse L. Goodman, M.D., M.P.H., Director of the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research. "There is no other instance where new vaccines must be made every year. The approval of flu vaccines is a part of FDA's mission to promote the health of Americans throughout the year."

Experts from FDA, CDC, the World Health Organization, and other institutions annually study virus samples and disease patterns collected worldwide in an effort to identify strains that may cause the most illness in the upcoming season. In addition, CDC conducts vaccine effectiveness studies to determine how well the vaccine protects against illness. However, it's important to remember that even during seasons when the vaccine is not optimally matched to predominant circulating viruses, *CDC and other experts continue to recommend flu vaccine as the best way to protect against the flu.*

**Autumn is the best time to get vaccinated**, although getting the vaccine in the winter months when flu season often peaks is also recommended.

Flu activity typically does not reach its peak in the U.S. until January or February. Getting the flu vaccine soon after it becomes available each year is always a good idea, and the pro-



tection you get from vaccination will last throughout the flu season. However, flu activity can occur as late as May so getting a vaccine later in the season, including in December, January or even later, and even if flu activity has already started in your area, can still offer protection in most years.

## There are two kinds of influenza vaccines:

- The **flu shot** contains an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The **nasal vaccine** is known by the trade name of FluMist<sup>\*\*\*</sup>. It contains weakened, live viruses, and is sprayed into both nostrils.

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.

**\*\*\*According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:**

### You Should Not Use FluMist If:

- You have certain lung conditions, including asthma, or heart conditions
- You have metabolic disorders such as diabetes or kidney dysfunction
- You have an immunodeficiency disease or are on immunosuppressive treatment
- You have had Guillain-Barré syndrome
- You are pregnant
- You have a history of allergy or hypersensitivity, including anaphylaxis, to any of the parts of FluMist or to eggs

Children or teenagers who regularly take aspirin or products containing aspirin also should not take FluMist.



## Who Should Get Vaccinated?

In general, anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting the flu can get vaccinated. However, certain people should get vaccinated each year either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for high risk persons.

The CDC has identified the following people who should get vaccinated each year:

1. Children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday
2. Pregnant women
3. People 50 years of age and older
4. People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
5. People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
6. People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:
  - a. Health care workers
  - b. Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
  - c. Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

## Everyday Preventive Actions Include:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.



- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get the flu, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.



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Please print out, distribute and/or post the attached CDC 'Take 3 Steps' poster. (see page 5)

# CDC Says: “Take 3” Steps to Fight the Flu

Flu is a serious contagious disease.

Each year in the United States, on average:

- More than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications.
- 20,000 of those hospitalized are children younger than 5 years old.
- 36,000 people die from flu.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urges you to take the following steps to protect yourself and others from influenza (the flu):



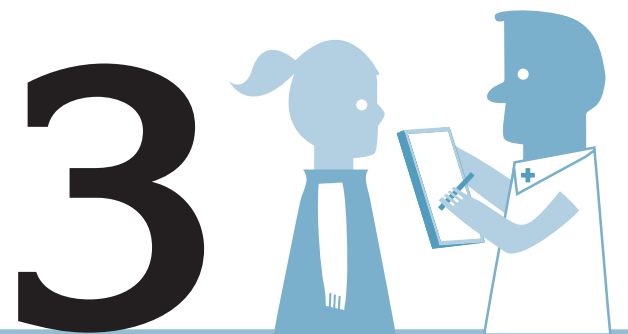
## Vaccinate

- Take time to get a flu vaccine.
- CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease.
- While there are many different flu viruses, the flu vaccine protects against the three main flu strains that research indicates will cause the most illness during the flu season.
- The vaccine can protect you from getting sick from these three viruses or it can make your illness milder if you get a different flu virus.
- Getting a vaccine is very important for people at high risk for serious flu complications, including young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart or lung disease, and people 65 years of age and older.
- People who live with or care for those at high risk should also get a flu vaccine to protect their high-risk contact.



## Stop Germs

- Take everyday preventive actions.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get the flu, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.



## Antiviral Drugs

- Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor recommends them.
- If you do get the flu, antiviral drugs are an important treatment option. (They are not a substitute for vaccination.)
- Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body.
- Antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. This could be especially important for people at high risk.
- For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms).
- Flu-like symptoms include fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches.



For more information about flu, visit [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)