



Influenza Vaccination Fact Sheet

What is the "flu?"

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. In an average flu season, about 36,000 Americans die and over 200,000 are hospitalized because of complications from the disease.

How does the flu spread?

Flu viruses spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

What are the symptoms of flu?

- fever (usually high)
- 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

How can the flu be prevented?

The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

Can anyone get a flu shot?

Yes. Any person over the age of 6 months is encouraged to get vaccinated. However, the following high-risk groups are most likely to suffer serious complications associated with the flu virus, and public health officials strongly urge these groups to get a flu shot:

- All children aged 6-59 months;
- Pregnant women;
- Persons over 50 years old;
- All persons over 6 months old with certain chronic medical conditions; and
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities.

How long does it take the flu shot to start working?

It can take about two weeks to develop full immunity after receiving a flu shot. Those at highest risk should be vaccinated during the month of October.

What about children getting the flu shot?

Children 6 months to 8 years old receiving the flu shot for the first time will need a follow-up booster one month after the first flu shot.

Where can I get more information about the flu?

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>