

## Influenza ("Flu") & Influenza Vaccine

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### ❑ WHAT IS INFLUENZA OR "FLU"?

Influenza or "flu" is a contagious, respiratory disease caused by a virus. The main, serious complications of influenza are pneumonia and worsening of chronic health problems.

### ❑ HOW IS FLU SPREAD?

- ✓ The flu spreads from person to person primarily through "respiratory secretions" or droplets (such as spit, saliva, and mucous) that contain flu viruses and are spread when infected persons cough or sneeze.
- ✓ These droplets can land in the mouth, nose, and throat of persons who are near (within 3 to 6 feet) of the ill person.
- ✓ Flu may also be spread through contact with the infectious respiratory secretions on the hands of an infected person and other objects and surfaces.

### ❑ WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU GET THE FLU?

People with the flu feel "sick all over." Typical symptoms include:

- ✓ Fever, chills, weakness, loss of appetite, and aching of the head, back, arms, and legs.
- ✓ Sore throat and cough, nausea, and burning eyes may occur.
- ✓ Fever (which can be as high as 104° F) and other severe symptoms of the flu usually last 3 to 7 days, but people may feel tired and weak longer.
- ✓ Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea may occur in infants and children.
- ✓ Complications include dehydration, pneumonia and worsening of other health problems such as asthma, bronchitis, heart disease, and diabetes.

### ❑ IS FLU CONSIDERED SERIOUS?

- ✓ For healthy children and adults, influenza is typically a moderately severe illness.
- ✓ For children under one year of age and all people who have chronic health problems such as diabetes, asthma, heart or lung problems, influenza can be very severe,

leading to hospitalization and even death. These people are considered to be at high risk for severe complications from influenza.

### ❑ HOW ARE FLU AND COMPLICATIONS FROM FLU PREVENTED?

- ✓ The best way to avoid the flu is to get vaccinated. Vaccination helps the body's immune system fight influenza viruses.
- ✓ Wash hands frequently or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and cover your mouth and nose when coughing.
- ✓ Avoid close contact with others who are ill.
- ✓ Stay home from work and school when you have a fever and cough.

### ❑ HOW ARE FLU AND COMPLICATIONS FROM FLU TREATED?

- ✓ Contact your health care provider if you have high fever or other serious symptoms.
- ✓ For uncomplicated flu, your healthcare provider will probably tell you to drink fluids and rest at home.
- ✓ Antiviral drugs can be prescribed by a healthcare provider to treat influenza and prevent complications in high-risk persons, but must be administered early in the infection, usually within 48 hours.
- ✓ Antiviral drugs can also be prescribed to prevent infection in people who are exposed to the flu.
- ✓ Antibiotics are not effective against the flu.

### ❑ WHO SHOULD GET FLU VACCINE?

**Vaccination is recommended for both people at high risk for serious influenza infections AND those who can give the flu to people at high-risk, including:**

- ✓ All children 6 to 59 months of age
- ✓ All persons aged 50 years and older
- ✓ Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season
- ✓ Adults and children with chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, lung disease (including asthma), kidney disease, or diabetes

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- ✓ Children and adolescents aged 6 months to 18 years on long-term aspirin therapy and at risk of Reyes’ syndrome
  - ✓ Persons with certain muscle or nerve disorders (such as seizure disorders or severe cerebral palsy) that can lead to breathing or swallowing problems, or weakened ability to cough
  - ✓ Persons with weakened immune systems due to HIV/AIDS or other diseases, long-term treatment with drugs such as steroids, or cancer treatment with x-rays or drugs
  - ✓ Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
  - ✓ Health-care personnel
  - ✓ Healthy household contacts (including children) and caregivers of children less than 5 years of age and adults over 50, especially contacts of children under 6-months of age
  - ✓ Healthy household contacts (including children) and caregivers of persons with medical conditions that put them at higher risk for severe complications from influenza
  - ✓ All persons, including school-aged children, who want to reduce the risk of becoming ill with influenza or of transmitting it to others
- ❑ IS FLU VACCINE SAFE?**
- ✓ Yes. Most people have little or no reaction to the vaccine, and those that do are better in 1 to 2 days.
  - ✓ One in four people might have non-serious swelling, redness, or tenderness where the vaccination was given.
  - ✓ People who receive the nasal flu vaccine may experience a runny nose, stuffy nose, and scratchy throat.
  - ✓ Severe reactions are extremely rare.
- ❑ WHAT KINDS OF VACCINES ARE THERE?**
- There are two kinds of flu vaccine: a shot and a nasal spray.
- ✓ The shot can be used for anyone age 6 months and older. For pregnant women and those with chronic medical conditions that increase their risk for severe flu, it is the best option.
- ✓ The nasal flu vaccine (LAIV or “Flumist”) is a good option to protect people aged 2 through 49 years who are healthy.
  - ✓ The following groups should NOT get the nasal flu vaccine:
    - People with chronic heart or lung disease, such as asthma or reactive airways disease
    - People with medical conditions such as diabetes or kidney failure
    - People with illnesses that weaken the immune system, or who take medications that can weaken the immune system
    - Pregnant women
    - Children between 2 and 5 years of age with recurrent wheezing
  - ✓ **You cannot get the flu from flu vaccine.**
  - ✓ For more information about the influenza vaccine or the nasal flu vaccine please see:
    - Flu shot vaccine information statement: <http://www.immunize.org/vis/2flu.pdf>
    - Nasal flu vaccine information statement: <http://www.immunize.org/vis/liveflu.pdf>
- ❑ CAN YOU GET THE FLU NEXT YEAR IF YOU HAD IT THIS YEAR?**
- ✓ Yes, because influenza viruses change each year and the body’s immune system can’t prevent infections with the changed viruses. *That is why it is important to get vaccinated each year.*
  - ✓ Each year, new flu vaccines are made to protect against the types of influenza expected to cause illness that year.
  - ✓ Flu vaccines protect against 3 types of influenza, two of influenza A and one influenza B.
- Available in alternate formats.