

General Flu Matte: General Audience
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How NOT to Win Friends and InFLUence People

Spread the word about the influenza vaccine, not the virus

If you've ever had influenza, or "the flu," you know it is far worse than the common cold. And while you lay in bed, exhausted, suffering from fever, body aches and terrible congestion for a week or so, you probably wondered who to blame for your illness and plotted revenge against the person who passed the flu on to you. But you may not realize that you were one of the lucky ones. Each year, on average, 36,000 Americans die of complications from the flu, and more than 200,000 are hospitalized.

This year, take action. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step you can take to protect yourself, your loved ones, and yes, even your co-workers and friends, from this serious disease.

Many people who are in otherwise good health mistakenly believe that they cannot get the flu, or that if they do, it won't be serious. But the flu is serious. And it can be particularly dangerous for certain people at high risk, including people 65 and older; people with chronic illnesses such as asthma, diabetes, cancer, kidney or heart disease; and pregnant women and young children. An otherwise healthy person may be sick in bed for a week with the flu, but passing the flu on to someone in one of these groups could kill that person.

That is why CDC recommends that people in high risk groups get an annual influenza vaccine and that close contacts of people in high risk groups get vaccinated, too. Vaccinating all family members and caregivers is particularly important for infants younger than six months of age who are too young for vaccination. This provides a protective "cocoon" around the child. For the same reason, CDC recommends that health care workers and anyone living with or caring for people in a high risk group get vaccinated, too. New this year is CDC's recommendation that children ages 6 months through 18 years get vaccinated to avoid getting and spreading the flu and having potentially serious complications that could result in hospitalization or even death. In addition, CDC advises people age 50 or older, who often have chronic illnesses, to protect themselves and loved ones by getting vaccinated.

The flu vaccine protects against the three main flu strains that research indicates will cause the most illness during the flu season. And each year, a new vaccine is produced to keep pace with constantly changing flu viruses. Getting vaccinated can protect you from getting sick from these three viruses or it can make your illness milder if you get a different flu virus.

While the timing of the flu season and its severity are unpredictable, flu is certain to be in your community; and the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from this serious respiratory disease is to get a flu vaccine.

People with a severe allergy to chicken eggs (the vaccine's viruses are grown in eggs) should avoid vaccination or talk with their doctor.

So inFLUence someone in a positive way and protect them from the misery of influenza—get vaccinated today. And besides, you don't want someone plotting their revenge against you if you unwittingly make them sick.

To learn more about the flu, call CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/flu.