

## Prevention and Treatment of The Flu Infection

### What is “the flu”?

The flu is a type of virus that can infect the nose, throat, and lungs. Your health care providers usually refer to this virus as influenza (in-floo-en-zuh). Illness from the flu can range from being mild to severe, even in healthy adults and children. The flu can be very severe, or even life threatening, for people who are at high-risk for complications—young children, the elderly, and people with chronic medical conditions. The flu is contagious. This means it can spread from person to person, usually by hand contact or with coughing or sneezing.



### How do I know if I have the flu?

If you are infected with the flu, you usually have several of these symptoms:

- Sudden onset of fever
- Chills
- Weakness
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Dry Cough
- Muscle Aches
- Sore Throat
- Runny Nose
- Nasal Congestion
- Eye irritation

Some people, especially children, may also have:

- A stomachache
- Nausea or vomiting

### Is the flu serious?

Some viruses, for example, those that cause the common cold, do not usually cause serious illness. The flu, however, is not simply a bad cold. It can cause serious complications like pneumonia (a lung infection), or worsening of a chronic medical condition. Infants and young children with the flu may develop wheezing or other infections.

People with chronic lung disease (for example emphysema, COPD, asthma, cystic fibrosis) or other chronic illnesses (for example -diabetes, heart or kidney disease, cancer sickle cell disease, a weakened immune system) are at an especially high risk for developing serious complications from the flu.

### What is the flu vaccine?

One of the most important ways to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated every year. These vaccines cause a person to make antibodies that protect him or her

from the flu virus. There are two flu vaccine types: the “flu shot” (inactivated vaccine) is usually given as a shot in the arm, and the “nasal spray vaccine” (live attenuated vaccine) is given as a nasal spray. Your health care provider can help you determine which vaccine is best for you. The flu shot cannot give you the flu infection.

### What about the vaccine shortage?

This year in the United States, it is expected that there will not be enough vaccine for everyone who might benefit from or wish to take a flu shot. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have issued guidelines\* for this year’s flu season (as of 10/04) that tell who is most important to give a flu shot. This is so that people who are at highest risk of dying or having serious complications from the flu receive the vaccine. If you need to be vaccinated, contact your flu vaccine provider (clinic, hospital, health department, physician) about getting your flu shot right away.

### Who should receive a flu shot this year?

- People 65 years of age and older
- Children ages 6 months to 23 months
- Adults and children 2 years of age and older with chronic lung or heart diseases, including emphysema and asthma
- Woman who are or will be pregnant during flu season
- Adults and children 2 years and older with chronic metabolic diseases (including diabetes),

\*These guidelines may change depending on availability of flu vaccine. Check with local authorities or media.

kidney disease, blood disorders (such as sickle cell anemia), or weakened immune systems, including persons with HIV/AIDS

- Children and teenagers who take daily aspirin therapy
- People who live in nursing homes and other chronic care facilities
- People who live with or regularly take care of infants under the age of 6 months
- Healthcare workers who provide direct, hands-on care to patients

If you have a severe (anaphylactic) allergy to egg, or a history of Guillain-Barre syndrome, speak to your doctor before getting a flu shot.

### Who should go without a flu shot this year?

Healthy people 2 to 64 years of age are asked to skip getting a flu shot this year, or to wait until persons in the high risk groups in their area have had a chance to be vaccinated.

### What about the nasal spray vaccine?

The nasal spray flu vaccine is an option for healthy individuals 5 to 49 years of age, people who take care of infants under 6 months of age and people who are healthcare workers that work directly with patients. It is called FluMist®.

Healthcare workers who take care of people with severely weakened immune systems should take the flu shot or check with the hospital before taking the nasal spray vaccine. The nasal spray vaccine should not be used by pregnant women. If you have a history of a severe (anaphylactic) allergy to egg or a history of Guillain-Barre syndrome, you may not be able to take the nasal flu vaccine.

### What else can I do to prevent the flu?

In addition to the flu vaccines, there are other ways to protect yourself and your family from respiratory infection, including:

- Wash your hands often and well. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Eat a well balanced, nutritious diet
- Keep good control of chronic illnesses, such as asthma
- Do not smoke and avoid being around any tobacco smoke

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, and throw away the tissue afterward

### What if I become infected with the flu?

- Treat symptoms (fever, muscle aches, headache) with over-the-counter acetaminophen or ibuprofen (never give children or teenagers aspirin without first speaking to your doctor)
- Speak to your doctor about prescription medicines (anti-virals) that can lessen your flu symptoms
- Rest as much as possible
- Drink plenty of liquids
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, and throw away the tissue afterward
- Stay home from work or school to keep from giving others the flu

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

#### Additional Lung Health Information

##### **American Thoracic Society**

[www.thoracic.org](http://www.thoracic.org)

##### **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

[www.cdc.gov/flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/)

##### **American Lung Association**

[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

##### **ATS Patient Advisory Roundtable**

[www.thoracic.org/aboutats/par/par.asp](http://www.thoracic.org/aboutats/par/par.asp)

## Rx *What to do...*

- ✓ See if you are in a high-risk group for the flu. If you are not sure, call your doctor or clinic to find out.
- ✓ If you need a flu vaccine, get it as soon as possible. It is best to have the flu vaccine before December.
- ✓ Wash your hands often and well
- ✓ Keep chronic diseases like asthma in good control.
- ✓ Keep your body healthy with diet, exercise and no smoking!

**Doctor's Office Telephone:**