

INFLUENZA

WHAT IS SEASONAL INFLUENZA (FLU)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. It infects the respiratory tract in humans (nose, throat, and lungs), and usually lasts 1-2 weeks. The flu is not the same as a cold or the “stomach flu.”

HOW IS INFLUENZA SPREAD?

When someone who has the flu coughs, sneezes or talks, the virus is dispersed through the air and may be inhaled by anyone close by.

FLU COMPLICATIONS:

Although most who get the flu will recover in less than 2 weeks, others will develop complications, which can be life-threatening, and may result in death:

- Pneumonia
- Bronchitis
- Sinus & ear infections
- Dehydration
- Worsened chronic pre-existing conditions (e.g. asthma attacks in someone who has asthma)

SYMPTOMS:

- Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

*Not always present with the flu

HIGH RISK GROUPS:

Those at high risk for complications from the flu include:

- Children <5, but especially <2 years
- Adults over the age of 65
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic medical conditions (e.g. heart disease, diabetes, asthma, chronic lung disease, people who are morbidly obese)
- American Indians & Alaskan Natives

PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS:

- **Everyone 6 months of age and older should get an annual flu shot.**
- Infants <6 months are the pediatric group at highest risk for complications, but are too young for the flu shot – all household members and caregivers should be vaccinated to protect them.
- Wash your hands often. Use soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if you cannot wash your hands. This is the easiest way to stop the spread of germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Some germs can live for 2 hours or more on surfaces like door knobs, desks, and tables.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. Cough or sneeze into the crease of your elbow, or into a tissue (and throw it away).
- Stay home when you feel sick, from work, stores, and public places. Keep sick kids home from school or daycare.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Practice good health habits, especially during flu season. Get plenty of sleep and exercise, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat healthy food.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT THESE FLU WEBSITES:

U.S. Health & Human Services:
www.flu.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
www.cdc.gov/flu