

What is influenza?

Influenza is a highly infectious viral illness. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times even lead to death. The best way to prevent influenza and its complications is by getting a flu **vaccination** each fall.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Illness will usually begin very suddenly 1-5 days after exposure and commonly lasts for 2-7 days. Symptoms usually include fever, cough, headache, muscle aches and fatigue. One in four children may have nausea, diarrhea or vomiting in addition to the respiratory symptoms. Children with influenza will not have nausea, diarrhea or vomiting without respiratory symptoms.

Who should get the influenza vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends certain people get the influenza vaccine. These people are at risk for having medical complications due to influenza or may be around people who are ill with influenza often. However it is wise for everyone who is able to get an influenza vaccination every year. The following are the groups of people who are recommended to receive the influenza vaccine:

Persons at high risk for influenza-related complications and severe disease, including

- children aged 6--59 months,
- pregnant women,
- persons aged ≥ 50 years,
- persons of any age with certain chronic medical conditions; and

Persons who live with or care for persons at high risk, including

- household contacts who have frequent contact with persons at high risk and who can transmit influenza to those persons at high risk and
- health-care workers.
- Any otherwise healthy non-pregnant person aged 5-49 is eligible for the influenza nasal vaccine (FluMist®).

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread from an ill person to other people by coughing and sneezing. Transmission may also occur through direct contact or indirect contact with respiratory secretions such as touching surfaces contaminated with influenza virus and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth.

What things can I do to prevent or reduce the spread of influenza in my office?

- ✓ **Annual influenza vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza.**
- ✓ **Stay home when sick.** Employees with symptoms of influenza should not come to work. Excluding ill employees from the work place can help reduce the spread of the illness to other employees. If possible, allowing employees to work from home when ill can help reduce the spread of disease.
- ✓ **Wash hands often.** People often catch influenza and other viruses by picking up the virus on their hands, and then touching their nose, eyes, or mouth. Wash hands several times a day, using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC song). Dry hands with paper towels or automatic hand dryers. Restrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and paper towels are available for employee use.
- ✓ **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** Influenza is often spread by coughs and sneezes. Make sure disposable tissues are available in work areas for runny noses and sneezing. Individuals should always cover their mouths with their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their nose. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and then hands should be washed.
- ✓ **Use hand sanitizer.** Encourage the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer at employee desks. Hand sanitizer is effective in killing germs on hands when they are not visibly soiled. Appropriate times to use hand sanitizer are after coughing, sneezing, or contact with infected surfaces (e.g. contact with a keyboard).
- ✓ **Contact your health care provider.** Employees should contact their physician when they become ill during influenza season. Anti-viral drugs may reduce the severity and length of illness when they are taken early in the illness. Antivirals need to be started within 48 hours of becoming ill to be effective.
- ✓ **Avoid close contact.** Employees should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, etc.
- ✓ **Clean surfaces often.** Common use surfaces, such as water fountains, door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, desks, etc., should be cleaned frequently with disinfectants. Commercial disinfectants or bleach solutions are appropriate. (Mixing $\frac{1}{4}$ cup bleach with 1 gallon of water makes bleach solution. This should be mixed fresh daily).