

What is influenza?

Influenza is an acute, highly contagious respiratory disease. It is characterized by sudden onset of fever, body aches, sore throat, headache and cough. About one in four children will also have vomiting, diarrhea and nausea in addition to the respiratory symptoms. Influenza is caused by a virus and should not be treated with antibiotics.

What can you do to prevent or reduce the spread of influenza in your home?

- ✓ **Get vaccinated!!!** The influenza vaccine is the BEST way to prevent influenza infection.
- ✓ **Stay home when ill.** Any family member suspected of having the influenza should not attend work or school. Ill family members should be encouraged to rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- ✓ **Wash hands often.** Wash hands frequently by using soap and warm water and rub your hands for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC's). Dry hands with as clean a towel as possible. Towels should be changed frequently. Young children should be instructed and assisted to make sure they wash their hands properly. Bathrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and towels are available for your family's use.
- ✓ **Cover coughs and sneezes.** Influenza can be spread by coughs or sneezes. Family members should cover their mouths using their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a disposable tissue when sneezing or blowing their noses. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and then hands should be washed. (If you cannot wash hands, rub hands with an alcohol hand gel.) Make sure tissues are available in the home and cars for runny noses and sneezing.
- ✓ **Use hand sanitizer.** Encourage the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hand washing is not possible. 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, eating or contact with infected surfaces (e.g., contact with phone, child's nose, doorknob).
- ✓ **Avoid close contact.** Spread of the influenza in homes is likely. Families should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, toothbrushes, etc.
- ✓ **Clean surfaces frequently.** Clean surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, kitchen table, etc. frequently with household cleaner or bleach solution. (Mixing ¼ cup bleach with 1 gallon of water makes a bleach solution. This should be mixed fresh daily.) If disinfectant is not available hot water and soap can be used.
- ✓ **If ill, consult a health care provider.** If family members get influenza, especially if they are elderly or have other medical problems, you may wish to contact their physicians immediately. Their doctors can prescribe antiviral drugs, which may stop them from getting seriously ill. However the medications must be given within 48 hours of the onset of illness. The medication may also be given to household contacts to prevent them from becoming ill.

Who should get the influenza vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends persons who are at risk for complications from influenza be vaccinated annually. However it is wise for everyone to receive an influenza vaccination every year. Listed below are the individuals who should 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®).