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AMERICAN THORACIC SOCIETY
Patient Information *Series*

Influenza—"The Flu"

2012–2013 Season Update

Prevention and Treatment of Influenza Infection

What is "the flu"?

The flu is a type of germ (called a virus) that you breathe in. It can get into the nose, throat, and lungs. Flu is also called influenza (in-floo- EN-zuh). This season's flu vaccine will protect you for the three strains of the flu. These three are most likely to cause you illness. Two of the three strains are different from last year. It is important to get a new vaccine every year.

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How do I know if I have the flu?

The flu usually starts suddenly and may include the following symptoms:

- fever (usually high)
- chills
- muscle aches
- weakness
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- headache
- red or itchy eyes
- dry cough
- tiredness (can be extreme)
- diarrhea (especially children)

What is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine can protect you against some types of flu virus. There are 3 forms:

- The flu "shot" is usually given in the muscle of the arm. The new flu "micro-shot" that is given in the skin of the arm. It can be given to adults between the ages of 18 to 64 years. I cannot make you sick with the flu.
- The flu nasal spray is a mist that is sprayed in your nose. This is a live weakened virus vaccine that cannot be used by people with lung or other health problems. The
- nasal spray can be given to healthy people between the ages of 2 and 49 years.
- Children between the ages of 6 months and 8 years who are getting a flu vaccine for the first time, need to get 2 doses, at least 4 weeks apart for full protection.

If you are allergic to eggs, speak to your health care provider before getting a flu vaccine. These vaccines are usually available by September and are usually available until March or April, when the flu season ends.

Who should receive a flu vaccine?

- All adults and children 6 months of age and older
- People who are at risk of getting a severe flu illness, including:
  - People over 65 years of age (a higher dose version of the vaccine is now available)
  - Pregnant women
  - Young children
- Caregivers of infants less than 6 months
- Adults and children with the following:
  - Chronic lung disease (including emphysema and asthma)
  - Chronic heart disease (except high blood pressure)
  - Chronic metabolic diseases (including

diabetes)
- Kidney disease
- Hepatic (liver) disease
- Blood disorders (including sickle cell anemia)
- Those with weakened immune systems such as those with HIV/AIDS or those who are immunosuppressed from chronic steroids, chemotherapy or radiation therapy
- Children and teenagers who take daily aspirin therapy
- Caregivers who live with or care for those at high risk for serious complications from the flu

Note: this list only provides examples of conditions for which the flu vaccine is recommended. Your healthcare provider may want you to have a flu shot for other conditions.

What can I do to prevent the flu?

- Wash your hands often and well. Use soap and water or a hand cleaner.
- Avoid being near people who are sick.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Keep good control of medical problems, such as asthma.
- Don't 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 have the flu?

- Treat signs of flu with medicines that relieve pain and fever such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil). Never give a child aspirin without first speaking to your health care provider.
- Ask your health care provider about prescription medicines that can help your flu symptoms. These medicines have to be started soon after the flu starts in order to help.
- Rest as much as possible.
- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth to prevent spreading germs.
- Stay home from work or school to keep from giving others the flu.
- Seek medical care immediately if you experience any of the following signs:
  - difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
  - pain/pressure in the chest or abdomen
  - sudden dizziness
  - confusion
  - severe vomiting that does not go away

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

American Thoracic Society
See publications on respirators at: http://patients.thoracic.org/information-series/en/resources/disposable-respirators.pdf

National Library of Medicine
http://www.nlm.nih.gov

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/flu

World Health Organization
www.who.int/topics/influenza/en/

United States Government Flu Resource
www.flu.gov

Rx *What to do…*

- ✔ 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 with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- ✔ Keep chronic diseases like asthma in good control.
- ✔ Keep your body healthy with diet, exercise and no smoking!
- ✔ Avoid contact with anyone known to have a fever or symptoms of the flu.
- ✔ Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- ✔ If you are having a fever and symptoms of the flu, ask your health care provider right away if you need to be treated and take an antiviral medicine. Get immediate medical attention if you are having severe symptoms.

Healthcare Provider's Office Telephone:

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