



Prevention

newsletter ...for the health and well-being
of you and your family.

Influenza is a serious disease that can lead to hospitalization and sometimes even death.

Every flu season is different, and influenza can affect people differently. Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and then spread it to others.



SYNERGYSOLUTIONS GROUP
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Facts About the Flu

The flu is an infection of the respiratory tract caused by the influenza virus. It usually causes mild to severe illness, but sometimes it can cause fatal complications.

Flu Symptoms

A person who has the flu often feels some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever and/or chills
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Cough and/or sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Muscle or body aches
- Stomach ailments such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults)

How the Flu is Spread

The flu spreads primarily when someone coughs, sneezes or talks, allowing the virus to become airborne and then infect other people. It can also spread if a healthy individual touches a surface that was previously touched by an infected person, and then the healthy individual touches his or her own mouth, eyes or nose. People are typically contagious from the day before symptoms start until seven days after symptoms appear.

The timing of the flu virus is very unpredictable and can vary from season to season. Flu activity most commonly peaks in the United States between December and February. However, seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October and continue as late as May.

If You Get the Flu

If you contract the flu, it is important to take good care of yourself. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following:

- Stay home from work! It's your best chance for recovery, and you will avoid spreading the disease to others.
- Get sufficient sleep.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Take over-the-counter (OTC) medications appropriate for your symptoms.
- Most people do not need medical care, but consult your doctor if you are concerned. Also, seek immediate medical attention if you have any of the warning signs discussed on the next page.

Prevention

Serious complications can arise from the flu, including bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions. This is why it is crucial to prevent contracting the virus in the first place.

These simple steps should be taken in order to avoid the flu:

- **Get a yearly flu vaccine.** It is the most important step in protecting against the virus. Flu vaccines are needed on a yearly basis because the body's immune response to a vaccination declines over time and because flu viruses are constantly mutating.
- **Take preventive actions.** Cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough. Try to avoid close contact with sick people and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Wash your hands often or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Take antiviral drugs** if your doctor recommends them. These are prescription drugs that fight the flu by keeping the viruses from reproducing in your body.
- **Maintain a healthy immune system** by eating healthy food, exercising, getting adequate sleep, controlling your stress level and avoiding smoking.

Emergency Situations

Occasionally, the flu can cause serious medical complications. It is important to seek immediate medical treatment if someone with the flu displays any of these signs.

In children, emergency warning signs include:

- Fast breathing (or difficulty breathing)
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or interacting with people
- Being so irritable the child does not want to be touched
- Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with a fever and a worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs are:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that improve, but then return with a fever and a worse cough

Flu Vaccination

The CDC recommends yearly flu shots for all individuals over six months of age. Vaccination is especially important for people who are at high risk for serious flu complications, such as young children, pregnant women, people with chronic medical conditions and people 65 years and older. While there are many different flu viruses, the seasonal flu vaccine is designed to protect against the main flu viruses that research suggests will cause the greatest spread of illness during the upcoming flu season. However, it is still possible to become ill from a strain of influenza not included in the vaccine. Even so, antibodies from a vaccination of one flu virus can sometimes provide protection against different but related viruses, and all recipients of a flu vaccine will be protected from the two main A-strains of flu, which are generally considered the most dangerous.

There are several [flu vaccine options](#) for the 2015-2016 flu season, which will greatly expand flu shot options for people who would otherwise be ineligible to receive a vaccination. The offerings include a new four-strain vaccine and nasal spray; a high-dose three-strain flu shot; two egg-free versions; and a shot that does not go beneath the skin.

All vaccines will protect against both Type A strains of influenza (H1N1 and H3N2), as well as a Type B strain. The four-strain, or quadrivalent, vaccine protects against both strains of Type B as well as the Type A strains. It has been difficult in the past to predict which B strain would become dominant in a given season, so the quadrivalent vaccine protects against both.

Also being offered this year are two egg-free shots for people who are allergic to eggs. Until recently, all vaccines were developed from chicken eggs and could not be given to people with egg allergies.



Contrary to popular belief, you cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine.

Additionally, a high-dose flu shot containing four times the usual dosage will be offered to older adults and other people with weakened immune systems as a way of boosting their bodies' responses to the virus.

Finally, people with an aversion to needles can choose to receive a "microneedle" version of the vaccine that is applied to the skin instead of the arm muscle.

Different flu shots are approved for people of different ages; there are even flu shots that are approved for use in people as young as six months of age. For many vaccine recipients, more than one type or brand of vaccine may be appropriate. Where more than one type of vaccine is appropriate and available, no preferential recommendation is made by the CDC for use of any influenza vaccine product over another. If you have questions about which vaccine is best for you, talk to your doctor or another health care provider.

Contrary to popular belief, you cannot contract the flu from the flu vaccine—but sometimes side effects mimic those of the flu, such as a headache, low fever and/or nasal congestion. However, these will only persist for a maximum of 24 hours.

These people should NOT get a flu vaccine without first consulting their physician:

- Those who have had a severe reaction or have developed Guillain-Barre syndrome within six weeks of getting an influenza vaccination; and
- Children under six months of age.

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