

Influenza (“the flu”) is a sudden, respiratory disease that spreads easily. It is characterized by the sudden onset of fever, body aches, sore throat, headache and cough. Approximately one in four children will also have vomiting, diarrhea and nausea.

- 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 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.
- 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.
- 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)
- In households with children less than 6 months of age, all family members should get the influenza vaccine.
- Spread of the influenza in homes is likely. Families should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, toothbrushes, etc.
- 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.
- When caring for a family member who is ill, hands should be washed immediately after helping them.
- 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?

It is recommended that everyone get the influenza vaccine however certain people are at risk for developing severe illness or complications from influenza and are strongly encouraged to get the influenza vaccine every year. Those groups include the following:

- persons aged ≥ 2 years with chronic health conditions (e.g. heart and lung disease, asthma, diabetes, etc.);
- residents of long-term--care facilities;
- persons aged ≥ 50 years, especially those over age 65;
- children aged 6--23 months;
- pregnant women;
- health-care personnel who provide direct patient care;
- household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children aged < 6 months.

Any otherwise healthy non-pregnant person aged 5-49 is eligible for the influenza nasal vaccine (FluMist®).