

FLU SEASON QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE



Flu Terms



The best ways to prevent the flu are to get a flu vaccine each fall and to practice good hygiene.

Two Types of Vaccines

- **THE "FLU SHOT"**— an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than six months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- **THE NASAL-SPRAY FLU VACCINE** — a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV for "Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine"). LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 5 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

ALWAYS PRACTICE GOOD HEALTH HABITS

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to prevent them from getting sick.
- Stay home from work, school and running errands when you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash your hands often with soap for at least 15 seconds and especially after using the restroom or changing a diaper; avoid touching your nose, eyes or mouth.

- **Seasonal (or common) flu** is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.
- **Avian (or bird) flu** is caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally among wild birds. It does not usually infect people, but more than 200 human cases have been reported in Europe, Africa and Asia. Most of these cases have occurred from direct or close contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces; however, a few cases of human-to-human spread of H5N1 virus have occurred. Symptoms of bird flu in humans have ranged from typical flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases (such as acute respiratory distress), and other severe and life-threatening complications.

The symptoms of bird flu may depend on which virus caused the infection.

Like most other influenza viruses, the H5N1 variant is deadly to domestic fowl and can be transmitted from birds to humans. There is no human immunity and no vaccine is available yet for the H5N1 virus, but vaccine development efforts are under way.

- **Pandemic flu** is virulent human flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness. Because there is little natural immunity, the disease can spread easily from person to person. Currently, there is no pandemic flu.

St. John's and other area health care providers participated in a pandemic flu readiness exercise led by the Springfield-Greene County Health Department in June. The exercise tested the community's ability to distribute vaccine from the national strategic stockpile.

"St. John's, through our flu readiness committee comprised of representatives from the infection control, nursing, security and supply departments, is working with the health department and other area hospitals to prepare for flu season," says William Sistrunk, M.D., St. John's infectious diseases specialist. "As a health care community, we are working on response plans for a pandemic flu outbreak and for a shortage of flu vaccine."

"Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May,"

— William Sistrunk, M.D., St. John's infectious diseases specialist

Each vaccine contains three influenza viruses—one A (H3N2) virus, one A (H1N1) virus, and one B virus. The viruses in the vaccine change each year based on international surveillance and scientists' estimations about which types and strains of viruses will circulate in a given year. About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies that provide protection against influenza virus infection develop in the body.

Who Should Not Be Vaccinated

There are some people who should not be vaccinated without first consulting a physician.

THESE INCLUDE PEOPLE WHO:

- Have a severe allergy to chicken eggs.
- Have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past.
- Developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within six weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously.
- Have a moderate or severe illness with a fever.

When to Get Vaccinated

October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you can still get vaccinated in December and later.

Who Should Get Vaccinated

In general, anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting the flu can get vaccinated. However, it is recommended that certain people should get vaccinated each year. They are either people who are at high risk of having serious flu complications or people who live with or care for those at high risk for serious complications.

PEOPLE WHO SHOULD GET VACCINATED EACH YEAR ARE:

- Children aged 6 months to 4 years old;
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women;
- Children and teenagers age 2 to 18 years who are on long-term aspirin therapy;
- People 50 years of age and older, and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions or weakened immune systems;
- Students or others living in communal settings;
- People who live in nursing homes and other long term care facilities;
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including health care workers, household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu;
- Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children younger than six months old.

In the event of a flu vaccine shortage, the Centers for Disease Control will determine priority groups for who should receive the vaccine, such as those considered to be at high risk for serious complications associated with the flu. For more information please call the Springfield-Greene County Health Department's flu hotline at 417-864-1166.