

Healthy People

What You Should Know About the Flu Season

What will this year's flu season be like?

It's not possible to predict what this flu season will be like. Flu seasons are unpredictable in a number of ways. While flu spreads every year, the timing, severity, and length of the season varies from one year to another. Flu viruses are constantly changing so it's not unusual for new flu viruses to appear each year. Most seasonal flu activity typically occurs between October and May. Flu activity most commonly peaks in the United States between December and February.

Who should be vaccinated?

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months of age and older as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease. People should begin getting vaccinated soon after flu vaccine becomes available, if possible by October, to ensure that as many people as possible are protected before flu season begins. However, as long as flu viruses are circulating in the community, it's not too late to get vaccinated. In addition to getting a seasonal flu vaccine if you have not already gotten vaccinated, you can take everyday preventive actions like staying away from sick people and washing your hands to reduce the spread of germs. If you are sick with flu, stay home from work or school to prevent spreading flu to others.

What to I do if I get sick?

Antiviral drugs are prescription drugs that can be used to treat flu illness. People at high risk of serious flu complications (such as children younger than 2 years, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with certain medical conditions) and people who are very sick with flu (such as those hospitalized because of flu) should get antiviral drugs. Some other people can be treated with antivirals at their health care professional's discretion. Treating high risk people or people who are very sick with flu with antiviral drugs is very important. Studies show that prompt treatment with antiviral drugs can prevent serious flu complications. Prompt treatment can mean the difference between having a milder illness versus very serious illness that could result in a hospital stay.

How can I protect myself and my family?

Encourage your loved ones to get vaccinated. Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk for serious flu complications, and their close contacts. Also, if you have a loved one who is at high risk of flu complications and who develops flu symptoms, encourage him or her to get a medical evaluation. He or she might need treatment with influenza antiviral drugs. The CDC recommends that people who are at high risk for serious flu complications who get the flu be treated with influenza antiviral drugs as quickly as possible. People who are not at high risk for serious flu complications who get the flu may be treated with influenza antiviral drugs at their doctor's discretion. Children between 6 months and 8 years of age may need two doses of flu vaccine to be fully protected from flu. The two doses should be given at least 4 weeks apart. Your child's doctor or other health care professional can tell you whether your child needs two doses. If your child does need two doses of vaccine to be fully protected, it is a good idea to begin the vaccination process sooner rather than later.

Children younger than 6 months are at higher risk of serious flu complications, but are too young to get a flu vaccine. Because of this, safeguarding them from flu is especially important. If you live with or care for an infant younger than 6 months of age, you should get a flu vaccine to help protect them from flu.

When should I get vaccinated?

The CDC recommends that people get vaccinated against the flu soon after vaccine becomes available, if possible by October. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the flu.

Where can I get a flu vaccine?

Flu vaccines are offered by many doctor's offices, clinics, health departments, pharmacies and college health centers, as well as by many employers, and even by some schools.

Even if you don't have a regular doctor or nurse, you can get a flu vaccine somewhere else, like a health department, pharmacy, urgent care clinic, and often your school, college health center, or work.

