facts about Influenza (Flu)

Influenza (flu) is caused by a virus that infects the nose, throat and lungs. Anyone can get the flu. For some people, flu can lead to other illnesses (complications) like pneumonia. Flu can make long term medical problems (like diabetes or heart disease) worse. People at greater risk of complications if they get the flu include:

- People age 65 and older
- Children under 5 years of age, especially children younger than 2
- Pregnant women
- People with long term health problems such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, kidney disease, blood disorders, nervous system problems, asthma, cancer, HIV/AIDS and people who are very overweight (have a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or greater).
- Native Americans and Native Alaskans also seem to be at greater risk

SYMPTOMS

- Fever or chills
- Headache
- Really tired
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches

Sometimes people have upset stomach, vomiting, and diarrhea—these symptoms are more common in children.

TREATMENT

The flu is treated by getting rest, drinking plenty of liquids and not using alcohol or tobacco products. There are over-the-counter medications that treat symptoms of the flu. There are also antiviral medicines that shorten how long you are sick. Antiviral medicines help prevent complications of the flu. These medicines must be taken soon after symptoms start. You must go to a doctor to get these medicines. The flu is not treated with antibiotics. Never give aspirin to children or teens unless a doctor tells you to.

HOW FLU SPREADS

Flu spreads through the air when someone who is sick with flu sneezes, coughs, or talks. Flu can also be spread when a person touches something that has flu virus on it (doorknobs, dirty hands, computer key boards, etc.) then touches their nose, eyes or mouth.

Flu can be spread from 1 day before symptoms begin to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick.

PREVENTING THE FLU

Get vaccinated

Flu viruses change and new strains of flu often appear. Flu vaccine is made each year to protect against the strains of flu most likely to make people sick. This is why you must get vaccinated against the flu every year.

Flu vaccine is the best way to prevent flu. It also makes it less likely for you to get really sick or end up in the hospital if you do get flu. Everyone over 6 months of age should get flu vaccine each year. It is especially important to be vaccinated if you:

- Are at higher risk of getting complications from the flu (see top of sheet)
- Live with or care for someone who is at higher risk of complications if they get the flu (see top of sheet)
- Live in a nursing home or long term care facility

how to prevent Influenza (Flu)

Not everyone can get flu vaccine and not everyone can get the same type of vaccine. Check with your vaccine provider to learn what type you can use or if you cannot take the vaccine.

Flu season in the US can begin as early as October and last until May. It takes a couple of weeks to get protection from the vaccine. People should get flu vaccine as soon as they can in the fall.

Flu shots
The flu shot is made from inactivated (killed) flu virus. It is usually given with a needle in the arm. There are several kinds of flu shots.

- The *regular flu shot* is given in the muscle. It is for anyone over 6 months of age, pregnant women and people with long term health problems.
- The *high dose flu shot* is also given in the muscle. This vaccine does a better job protecting older adults. It is for people over 65 years of age.

Nasal spray vaccine
The nasal spray vaccine is made from live, weakened virus. This vaccine is sprayed into the nose. It can be given to healthy people ages 2-49 years. The nasal spray vaccine is not for pregnant women or people who are at higher risk for complications from the flu (see other side). They should get the flu shot instead.

Wash hands often

WHEN TO WASH

- Before and after eating
- Before, during and after making and touching food
- After using the bathroom or helping a child use the bathroom
- After changing or checking a diaper
- After coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose and after wiping a child's nose
- After touching blood or body fluids (urine, feces, vomit, etc)
- After touching animals or their waste
- After touching trash
- After touching money
- Whenever hands look, feel or smell dirty

Other Ways to Prevent Flu

- Use a tissue to cover coughs and sneezes. Throw used tissues into the trash. No tissue? Cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Stay home when you are sick. Keep sick children home from school/childcare.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth unless you have just washed your hands.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- Keep yourself healthy—stay up to date on all your vaccines. Eat healthy foods. Exercise daily. Get enough sleep. Reduce stress.

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WAKE COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA