

What is influenza?

Influenza is a virus that causes respiratory illness in humans and also infects many types of animals. There are three types of influenza virus, A, B and C. Only types A and B cause respiratory illness.

When does influenza occur?

Influenza usually occurs in the late fall and winter in the United States.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread from an ill person to other people by coughing and sneezing.

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®).

When should I get the influenza vaccine?

Everyone should try to get a influenza vaccination however people with certain medical conditions, elderly and the very young should get the influenza vaccine as early in the season as it is available. Due to potential delays in the vaccine supply, you may not be able to get the vaccine until later in the fall or early winter. Even if you get the vaccine later in the influenza season you will still be better protected than if you did not get the vaccine.

Check the IDPH website periodically or talk to your health care provider for the most up to date information at www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/flu.asp.

Why do I have to get the influenza vaccine every year?

The influenza virus changes every year as it infects people all over the world. Public health officials and vaccine manufacturers determine which strains are most common every year and put 3 of those strains into the vaccine. Since those three strains are almost never the same from year to year, the vaccine is different every year. In addition, the immunity from the vaccine weakens greatly after a year and will not protect for more than one influenza season.

What should I do if I cannot get the influenza vaccine?

Be PROACTIVE to PREVENT!

- It sounds simple, but washing **your hands and using alcohol-based hand sanitizer** frequently throughout the day is the best defense. Wash your hands before and after eating, going to the restroom, having contact with pets, contaminated surfaces such as phones or keyboards. If hand washing is not available, then alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be used when hands are not visibly soiled.
- Stay home from work or school when you are ill and encourage other to do the same. You will set an example for others in addition to making sure others do not become ill as well.

- Stay away from others you know are ill. Maintaining at least a 3-foot distance from someone who is actively coughing or sneezing will help reduce your risk of becoming ill.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Illness will usually begin very suddenly. 1-5 days after exposure and commonly lasts for 2-7 days. Symptoms usually include fever, cough, headache, muscle aches and fatigue. One in four children will have nausea, diarrhea or vomiting.

Are there medications available to treat influenza?

Persons with influenza should get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids. Treatment is available for influenza A and B, but must be taken within 48 hours of the start of your illness to be effective. Treatment is only available by prescription through your health care provider and may also reduce the ability to spread influenza to others.

Can you get influenza more than once?

Yes. The type of influenza that goes around changes every year. Most people will get influenza several times in their lifetime.