

will still be beneficial in most years. You can get the vaccine as long as illness is occurring in your area. In many years, most cases of the flu occur in January or February.

The influenza virus changes from year to year. Because of this, the vaccine is updated every year and it is important to get vaccinated every year.



Photo Credit: James Gathany

Proper hand washing is very important in reducing the spread of germs that transmit the flu. Wash your hands frequently. If hand washing facilities are not available, use a hand sanitizer until you can wash your hands properly.

To properly wash your hands, use plenty of soap and warm running water, rub your hands together vigorously for at least 20 seconds, wash the palms and backs of your hands, rinse thoroughly, allow hands to air dry or use paper towels and use the paper towel to turn off the water tap and open the bathroom door.

Facts about the influenza vaccine

- * Influenza vaccine will not protect you from other respiratory infections such as colds and bronchitis.
- * You cannot get the flu from the vaccine.
- * Influenza vaccine is fully paid for by Medicare Part B.



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Bergen County Executive

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Your local health department provides immunization programs. Check with them to see when and where flu vaccine programs will be held in your area. Because many programs target only selected at-risk people, confirm that you are eligible for the program. To find other flu programs available in your area, visit the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Service's website at www.state.nj.us/health/flu.

Sources: National Coalition for Adult Immunization
at www.immunizeseniors.org
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
at www.nfid.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
at www.cdc.gov



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FACTS ABOUT INFLUENZA



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FACTS ABOUT INFLUENZA

What is influenza?

Influenza, also called the flu, is a highly contagious disease caused by the influenza virus. It is spread easily from person to person, primarily when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The flu is one of the most severe illnesses of the winter season. It may lead to hospitalization or even death, especially among the elderly.

SYMPTOM	THE FLU	COLD
Onset of symptoms	Sudden onset	Gradual onset
Fever	High, often with chills	None or mild
Headache	Severe	None or mild
Muscle and body aches	Severe	None or mild
Fatigue, weakness	Severe	None or mild
Nasal congestion, sneezing	None	Present
Cough	Severe dry cough	None or mild
Sore throat	Possible	Present
Duration	4-7 days, fatigue and weakness can last 2-3 weeks	2-4 days, congestion can last 5-7 days
Possible complications	Bronchitis, pneumonia, sometimes death	Sinus infection, earache

Do I have the flu?

The flu is often confused with other illnesses. It is important to correctly identify the condition before treatment is begun.

The previous table will help you distinguish between a cold and the flu. However, only a qualified health professional can diagnose illnesses.

Note that the flu does not cause nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. What people sometimes call the “stomach flu” is most likely due to food poisoning or an infection in the gastrointestinal tract.

What if I get the flu?

If you develop the flu:

- * Contact your health care provider
- * Stay in bed
- * Minimize contact with others to keep from spreading the flu
- * Get as much rest as possible.
- * You can be contagious for 3 – 7 days after you start feeling sick, so take time off from work and social activities.
- * Drink plenty of clear liquids and use over-the-counter pain medicines like acetaminophen, aspirin or ibuprofen, for fever and body aches if suggested by your health care provider.

When should I contact the doctor?

As soon as you think you have the flu, contact your doctor. If treatment is started within 24 – 48 hours of onset of the illness, prescription medications are available that can decrease the severity and duration of the flu.

Also, seek medical attention promptly in the following situations:

- * Your fever or cough worsens
- * You are coughing up blood or thick, foul-smelling mucus
- * You have chest pain or shortness of breath
- * You develop an earache.

Who should get the influenza vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) **recommends** that anyone who is at risk of complications from the flu or who is more likely to require medical care receive a vaccine, including:

- * People 50 years of age and older
- * Women who will be pregnant during the flu season
- * People with underlying chronic disorders, including conditions of the heart or lungs, asthma, diabetes mellitus, kidney disease, and a weakened immune system, or certain muscle or nerve disorders that can lead to breathing or swallowing problems
- * Residents of nursing homes or other chronic-care facilities
- * All children aged 6 months until their 5th birthday
- * Anyone 6 months to 18 years of age on long-term aspirin treatment.

In addition, the following should be vaccinated to prevent spreading flu to those at high risk for influenza-related complications: health care workers and household members living with those in the high-risk groups including children.

There are two types of vaccines that protect against the flu. The “flu shot” is approved for use among people over 6 months of age, including healthy people and those with chronic medical conditions. The nasal-spray flu vaccine is approved for use only among healthy people between the ages of 5 and 49 years.

Those who are allergic to eggs should NOT receive the vaccine. Those allergic to Thimerosal (mercury) should ONLY receive the vaccine if the preservative-free vaccine is being administered. Be sure health care professionals administering the vaccine are aware of your allergy.

How do I prevent the flu?

The vaccine to protect against the flu is usually given in the fall (October through November), but getting vaccinated in December, or even later,