

SAFETY TALK

September 26, 2020

Preparing for Seasonal Influenza

Seasonal influenza (the flu) is a respiratory infection caused by a virus. Not everyone who gets the flu develops symptoms, but they can still spread it to others, especially if they cough or sneeze. The flu may seem similar to other respiratory viruses or the common cold. However, the signs and symptoms are usually more severe than the common cold. Sudden high fever, body aches, extreme tiredness and dry cough are more common with the flu than the common cold. Other symptoms include headache, chills, loss of appetite and sore throat. Nausea and upset stomach may also occur.

The flu can lead to more serious problems like pneumonia and bacterial infections, sometimes resulting in hospitalization. The flu season occurs each year in the fall and lasts into the spring.

How can you avoid the Flu? The flu can spread easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing or sharing food or drinks. You can also get the flu by touching objects contaminated with flu virus and then touching your mouth, eyes or nose. For this reason, it's important to cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze, avoid touching your face, and wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after coughing and sneezing. For your protection, consider getting immunized with the flu vaccine.

What is the flu vaccine? There are many different strains of flu virus that circulate each year. The flu vaccine does not protect against all of them. Every year, scientists monitor the global spread of flu and decide which flu strains will likely cause the most illness during the upcoming flu season. Those strains are then put into the flu vaccine for that year. As a result, the vaccine can be different each year. For this reason, and because protection provided by the vaccine decreases over time, it's important to get the flu vaccine every year.

The flu vaccine cannot offer protection against other viral or bacterial infections including illnesses like the common cold, stomach flu, or other respiratory illnesses including COVID-19.

Why should people get the flu vaccine? Immunization against the flu has been shown to reduce the number of physician visits, hospitalizations, and deaths, particularly among those who are at increased risk of serious illness from the flu. Immunization is the best way to protect you and your family against the flu that can often be serious and sometimes fatal. Vaccines help prepare your body to fight potential future exposure to the flu by getting your immune system ready.

The seasonal influenza vaccine takes about two weeks to start working. Therefore, it is important that you and your family get immunized early in the fall BEFORE the flu starts to circulate.

How can being protected from the flu impact COVID-19? Reducing the demand on medical services to handle cases of the flu will allow for more resources to be ready, if they are needed, for COVID-19. Since the symptoms for flu and COVID-19 are similar, being protected from the flu will reduce the demand on COVID-19 testing and self quarantining because of the flu. The cumulative affects of Influenza and COVID-19 are not understood but the current opinion is that getting one or the other would make you more vulnerable to getting the other.

Refer to your Public Health Authority for more information about the flu, immunization, and COVID-19.

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