

2011-12 FLU TALKING POINTS

Influenza is a serious illness

1. Influenza (flu) is a contagious and serious disease. It is one of the top 10 leading causes of death in the United States. Anyone can get sick from flu.
2. While the flu can make anyone sick, certain people are at a greater risk for serious complications from the flu, causing hospitalization or even death, such as:
 - People 65 years of age and older
 - young children
 - pregnant women
 - people with certain health conditions, including chronic lung disease (such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), diabetes (type 1 and 2), heart, lung or kidney disease, a weakened immune system and certain other long-term medical conditions.
3. Symptoms of influenza can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.
4. Flu can cause high fever, pneumonia and worsen existing medical conditions. It can cause diarrhea and seizures in children. Each year thousands of people die from flu and even more require hospitalization.

Flu vaccine is the best protection

1. The first and most important step in protecting against the flu is to get a flu vaccine each season.
 - A flu vaccine reduces your risk of illness, hospitalization, or even death and can prevent you from spreading the virus to others.
 - Flu can affect people differently based on people's immune systems. Even healthy children and adults can get very sick from the flu. Anyone with the flu can spread it to family and friends. Protect your family and friends from the flu by getting yourself vaccinated.

2. Since protection from flu vaccine has been shown to decline over time, annual vaccination is recommended for optimum protection against influenza, even in seasons in which vaccine virus strains do not change.
3. Everyone 6 months of age and older is recommended to be vaccinated against flu every year, even if they got vaccinated the year before.
 - Some children 8 years of age and younger may need two doses of the flu vaccine. Ask your doctor.
4. Vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of severe flu and their close contacts, including healthcare personnel and close contacts of children younger than 6 months and pregnant women.
 - Children younger than 6 months are at high risk of serious flu illness, but are too young to be vaccinated. People who care for them, including new and expecting mothers, should be vaccinated instead.
5. Get vaccinated as soon as vaccine becomes available in your community.
6. The flu vaccine provides protection that lasts throughout the flu season.
7. While there are many different flu viruses, the flu vaccine protects against the three viruses that research suggests will be most common.
 - The 2011-2012 flu vaccine will protect against:
 - an influenza A H3N2 virus,
 - an influenza B virus, and
 - the H1N1 virus that caused a pandemic in 2009
 - Although last flu season's vaccine also provided immunity against the same three viruses, it's still important to get vaccinated this season.
 - Protection from flu vaccine wears off over time, and last year's vaccine may not fully protect you this season. For the best protection, get vaccinated every year.

Help stop the spread of germs

1. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
2. Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
4. Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
5. If you are sick with flu-like illness stay home for at least 24 hours until you are fever-free and feel normal again (except to get medical care or for other necessities).
6. While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.

Flu vaccine is widely accessible

1. Ask your doctor or nurse for flu vaccine for you and your family.
2. Even if you don't have a regular doctor or nurse, flu vaccines are offered in many locations, including your health department, pharmacy, urgent care clinic, and maybe your school, college health center, or work.

Flu vaccine effectiveness

1. The effectiveness of flu vaccines can vary and depends, in part, on the match between the viruses in the vaccine and the flu viruses that are circulating in the community, as well as the age and health of the person being vaccinated.
2. The influenza vaccine is used to prevent flu illness, not to treat it.
3. A flu vaccine protects against influenza. It will not protect against other respiratory viruses that may have similar symptoms to the flu.
4. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for your body to build sufficient immunity to protect against the flu.

5. Influenza vaccination can prevent illness. It can also lessen the severity of illness if you are exposed to a flu virus that is related to the flu viruses in the vaccine.
6. Some people should talk with a doctor before getting an influenza vaccine:
 - those with severe allergy to chicken eggs
 - those with an allergic reaction to flu vaccines in past
 - those who have ever had Guillain-Barré Syndrome (a severe paralytic illness, also called GBS)
7. People who have a moderate to severe illness should wait until symptoms pass to get vaccinated.
8. For more information about the seriousness of influenza and the benefits of influenza vaccination, talk to your doctor or nurse, visit www.cdc.gov/flu or call CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO.

Timing of vaccination against flu

1. Get vaccinated as soon as the vaccine is available in your community.
2. In recent seasons, most infections have occurred in January and February. Vaccination before December is best to make sure you're protected during the peak.
3. People should get vaccinated throughout the flu season from October through May. As long as flu viruses are still spreading in the community, vaccination can provide protective benefit.