

## **Facts About Seasonal Influenza (Flu)**

### **What is Influenza (Also Called Flu)?**

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

Every year in the United States, on average:

- 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu;
- more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu-related complications; and
- about 36,000 people die from flu-related causes.

Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), are at high risk for serious flu complications.

### **Symptoms of Flu**

Symptoms of flu include:

- fever (usually high)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults

### **Complications of Flu**

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

### **How Flu Spreads**

Flu viruses are thought to spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

### **Preventing Seasonal Flu: Get Vaccinated**

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each year. There are two types of vaccines:

- The "flu shot" – an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle. The flu shot is approved for use in people 6 months of age and older, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.

### **Actions Employers Should Take Now**

Review or establish a flexible influenza pandemic plan and involve your employees in developing and reviewing your plan;

Conduct a focused discussion or exercise using your plan, to find out ahead of time whether the plan has gaps or problems that need to be corrected before flu season;

Have an understanding of your organization's normal seasonal absenteeism rates and know how to monitor your personnel for any unusual increases in absenteeism through the fall and winter.

Engage state and local health department to confirm channels of communication and methods for dissemination of local outbreak information;

Allow sick workers to stay home without fear of losing their jobs;

Develop other flexible leave policies to allow workers to stay home to care for sick family members or for children if schools dismiss students or child care programs close;

Share your influenza pandemic plan with employees and explain what human resources policies, workplace and leave flexibilities, and pay and benefits will be available to them;

### **Encourage employees to get vaccinated**

Encourage your employees to get vaccinated for seasonal influenza.

Offer opportunities at your worksite for influenza vaccination.

### **Cover coughs and sneezes**

Influenza viruses are thought to spread mainly from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. Provide employee messages on the importance of covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or, in the absence of a tissue, one's sleeve. Place posters in the worksite that encourages cough and sneeze etiquette.

**Improve hand hygiene**

Influenza may be spread via contaminated hands. Instruct employees to wash their hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner, especially after coughing or sneezing. Place posters in the worksite that encourage hand hygiene.

Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand sanitizers in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. If feasible, place hand sanitizers in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.

**Clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact**

Frequently clean all commonly touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.

Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business/guidance/>