

Fast Facts About Flu

What is Flu?

- Seasonal influenza, commonly called “flu,” is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus that infects the nose, throat, and lungs. The flu can cause mild to severe illness, and in some cases, can lead to significant complications including hospitalization or death.¹
- Some common symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny, or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches and fatigue.¹
- In the U.S., about 5 to 20 percent of the population² gets the flu each year, with many experiencing flu-related complications—such as pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions—which may require hospitalization.² In fact, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications on average each year in the U.S.²
- The 2012-2013 flu season in the U.S. was early and one of the most intense on record.³ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that rates of pneumonia and influenza diagnoses were the highest recorded in nearly a decade.³

When and How Is Flu Spread?

- Influenza occurs in epidemics each fall and winter in the U.S., commonly peaking in January or February. Seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October, however, and continue to occur as late as May.¹ The 2012-2013 flu season, for example, began 4 weeks earlier than average, in late November.⁴
- Experts believe that flu viruses are spread mainly by droplets released when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. Most healthy adults can infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick.¹

How Can I Protect Myself and My Loved Ones From Flu?

- The CDC reports that the single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each and every season, and recommends that everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine each year, as soon as they are available.¹
- There are two types of flu vaccines:
 - **Nasal-spray vaccine**, or live attenuated vaccine¹
 - **Flu shots**, or inactivated vaccines¹
- Historically, seasonal flu vaccines have protected against three subtypes of influenza viruses that commonly circulate among people today: influenza A (H1N1) viruses, influenza A (H3N2) viruses, and one lineage of influenza B viruses. In standard vaccines, one flu virus of each kind is used to produce seasonal influenza vaccines.⁵
- For the first time, in the 2013-2014 flu season, vaccines will be available (nasal-spray and shot) that work to help protect against two subtypes of influenza A, but also two lineages of influenza B.⁶ The inclusion of a second B strain helps provide additional protection against influenza B strains that may circulate in the next flu season.⁶

Where Can I Learn More About Flu?

- For more information, please visit www.facebook.com/dontwaitvaccinate or www.cdc.gov/flu/.

References

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3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2012-2013 Flu Season Drawing to a Close. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/spotlights/2012-2013-flu-season-wrapup.htm>. Accessed April 3, 2013.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Press Briefing Transcript: Telebriefing on U.S. Influenza Activity and Vaccination Rates for Current Season. http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2012/t1203_influenza_activity.html. Accessed April 3, 2013.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm>. Accessed April 18, 2013.
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