



What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza, also known as the flu, is an illness that can cause a high fever, a bad headache, body aches, a dry cough, a sore throat, a runny nose and makes you feel very tired. It is usually spread from person to person by coughing and sneezing and can be spread before you know you are sick. Influenza is different from the common cold and the “stomach flu.” It usually begins suddenly and can make you feel so tired that you have trouble getting out of bed. Most people who get influenza will recover in one to two weeks, but some people can get very sick with pneumonia, have to stay in the hospital, or may even die. Very young children, pregnant women, people age 65 years and older, and anyone with a chronic medical problem like asthma, diabetes, heart disease or lung disease are most at risk from influenza.

What can you do to protect yourself from the flu?

Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics like penicillin do not help your body fight the illness. The best way to prevent influenza is to get the influenza vaccine. The best time to get your vaccine is sometime between August and November each year, but if you get the vaccine in December or January, it can still be helpful. Flu season in Ohio can begin as early as October, usually peaks in January and February, and can end as late as May. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get the influenza vaccine because the virus can change each year. When you get the influenza vaccine, you can protect yourself and other people around you.

There are two types of influenza vaccine:

- The ‘flu shot’. This type contains an inactivated vaccine, made up of killed viruses. It is injected into the muscle with a needle in the upper arm or upper thigh. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people, pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions. Some adults can receive the ‘intradermal’ shot which is injected into the skin with a shorter needle.
- The ‘nasal-spray’. This type contains a live, weakened flu vaccine (called LAIV for ‘Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine’). LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 2 to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

You can help prevent the spread of influenza when you:

- Get vaccinated.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. You can use an alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available.
- Cough or sneeze into the bend of your arm. When you use a tissue, be sure to throw it away after you use it.
- Stay home if you are sick. Avoid being around others when you are sick.

What about antiviral medicines?

Antivirals can be very helpful when started within two days from the onset of influenza. You will need a prescription to get antiviral medicines, so contact your health care provider right away if you think you have the ‘flu’. You can read more about influenza at www.cdc.gov/flu.