

This is the Beginning of the Peak **Flu Season!**

At least 20 million people, including 500,000 U.S. citizens, died in the 1918 influenza pandemic. Today, as many as 36,000 Americans die each year of what's commonly known as the flu, and another 150,000 are hospitalized. You're especially at risk if you are an older adult, have diabetes, chronic lung disease, or an impaired immune system.

However, anyone can get influenza, a viral infection that attacks your respiratory system, including your nose, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs. Although other viral infections, especially colds and intestinal ailments such as gastroenteritis, --a condition that causes diarrhea, nausea and vomiting—are often referred to as the flu, they're not.

Real influenza usually does not affect your intestines. And while you may cough and sneeze with the flu, you're also likely to have a high fever (101 degrees or more), chills and body aches --signs and symptoms you won't typically have with a cold. You are also likely to feel worse with the flu than with a cold. Although you can probably carry on with a cold, the flu can knock you flat. Even after you've recovered you may still feel tired.

You're exposed to the flu when someone who's infected with the influenza virus coughs or sneezes or you touch something they've handled. That's why it spreads rapidly anywhere people congregate, schools, offices, buses, stores, (while you are Christmas shopping) and yes hospitals. Most outbreaks in North America occur between October and May. The peak season is usually the last weeks of December to early March.

Other signs and symptoms include: Chills and sweats--A dry cough--Muscular aches and pains, especially in your back, arms and legs--Fatigue and weakness--Nasal congestion--Loss of appetite.

You should seek medical help if you have trouble breathing, a severe sore throat, a cough that produces a lot of green or yellow mucus, or if you feel faint. See your doctor if you think you might have signs or symptoms of pneumonia. These may include a severe cough that brings up phlegm, a high fever and a sharp pain when you breathe deeply.

The flu typically has an incubation period of one to four days, although symptoms usually come on suddenly. In most cases, you should feel better in about a week to 10 days unless you develop a serious post-flu lung infection, such as pneumonia or subacute bronchitis, an inflammation of the lining of your bronchial tubes. Pneumococcal pneumonia is the most common severe complication of influenza. For older adults and people with chronic heart or lung disease, or compromised immune systems, pneumonia

can be deadly. The best protection is to get vaccinated against both pneumococcal pneumonia and influenza. Flu vaccines need yearly updates.

The flu is caused by three types (strains) of viruses: influenza A, B and C. Type A is responsible for the deadly flu pandemics that strike every 10 to 40 years, whereas type B causes smaller more localized outbreaks. Type C is less common and causes only mild symptoms. Type C is a fairly stable virus, but type A and B are constantly changing, with new strains appearing regularly. This results in a new epidemic every few years. Localized epidemics involving virulent strains of flu generally occur about every three to 15 years.

Once you've had the flu, you develop antibodies to the virus that caused it, but those antibodies won't protect you from new strains. And although outbreaks in different regions generally vary in their duration and severity, the fact that millions of people travel every day means that regional strains of flu can show up just about anywhere.

See next page for Flu Prevention Tips

To Prevent Flu, **Keep Hands Clean !**

To stay healthy:

1. Clean hands often with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
2. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
3. Avoid contact with people who are sick.
4. Get vaccinations for flu and pneumonia as recommended for your age and health conditions.

Stopping the spread of germs if sick:

1. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue every time you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissue in a wastebasket.
2. If you do not have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve not your hands.
3. After sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose, always wash your hands or use an alcohol-based cleaner.
4. Stay home if you are sick.
5. Do not share drinking glasses, towels or other personal items.
6. Do not visit a friend or relative who is in the hospital when ill.

Flu shots are recommended for the following individuals:

1. People more than 50 years of age.
2. Adults and children with chronic diseases like diabetes or chronic disorders of the heart or lungs.
3. Anyone 6 months to 18 years of age on long-term aspirin treatments.
4. Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
5. Women who will be in their second or third trimester of pregnancy during the flu season.
6. Physicians, nurses and health care workers, child care workers or anyone coming into contact with people at risk of serious influenza.
7. Anyone who has a disease that affects the immune system.
8. And, anyone who does not want to get the flu.