

From the Health Office

What is the Flu?

Influenza (also known as the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. Two basic types of virus circulate in the United States, group A and group B. Influenza A may cause moderate to severe illness in all age groups and infects humans and other animals. Influenza B causes milder symptoms and affects only humans, primarily children.

How Do I Get the Flu?

The flu is spread through:

- The air from the respiratory tract of a person who has the flu, like through coughing and sneezing
- By direct contact with respiratory droplets

To protect yourself, and others, from the flu it's important to:

- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue (be sure to throw away any used tissues)
- Cough or sneeze into your



elbow

- Wash your hands often

Flu Symptoms

Usually, people with the flu have symptoms including:

- sudden fever
- headache
- aching muscles
- burning sensation in chest
- sore throat
- eye pain
- dry cough
- sensitivity to light
- runny nose

Preventing the Flu

The best way to protect yourself, and others, from the flu is to get vaccinated. You can be vaccinated any time during the flu season. It takes about two weeks for your body to protect itself from the flu after you are vaccinated, so the earlier you get vaccinated, the better.

Whether you get the flu vaccine or not, there are ways you can avoid the flu and stay healthy:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, stay away from others to protect them from getting sick, too.
- Stay home when you are sick. If you can, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- Wash your hands often, especially before eating or after touching common surfaces like door knobs or hand rails.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Get care early. See your healthcare provider immediately if you develop flu symptoms; antiviral medications can help if taken early in the illness.

Getting the Flu Vaccine

The CDC is encouraging all people over the age of 6 months old to be vaccinated for the flu. Some groups are more likely to have complications from the seasonal flu. These include:

- Those age 65 and older
- Children younger than 2 years old
- People of any age who have chronic medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, asthma, congestive heart failure, lung disease)
- Pregnant women

The benefits of immunization outweigh the risks. This year, a new vaccine, **FluBlok**, is available so people with egg allergies can get vaccinated for the flu. Further information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>

Reference: Connecticut Department of Public Health