

## Flu Alert - Winter 2013

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is reporting “widespread” cases of influenza – the “flu” – this year, and earlier in the year than in past years. Be sure to defend yourself this cold and flu season by getting a flu vaccination right away. Getting your flu vaccine will not only help keep you from getting the flu, but immunizing yourself also protects your family, friends and co-workers.

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. As people age, it becomes more difficult for them to fight illness. But fortunately, you can take measures to protect yourself by being vaccinated against both the flu and pneumonia.

Below are answers to some commonly asked questions about the flu.

### Who should be vaccinated?

Those who should get the flu vaccine include:

- Everyone 6 months and older.
- Those who are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications such as young children, those with chronic health conditions including asthma, heart disease, and lung disease, and those over age 65.
- Those who care for patients that are considered to be high risk of flu complications.

If you haven't gotten a flu shot yet, it's not too late. Since influenza activity typically doesn't peak until January or February, it's still worth getting the vaccine as late as January. The pneumonia vaccine is offered year round.

### What else can I do to reduce my chances of getting the flu?

There are steps you can take to help protect you from getting the flu:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Practice good health habits. Get plenty of sleep and exercise, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat healthy food.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

### How do I know if I have the flu?

You may have the flu if you have some or all of these symptoms:

- fever (although not everyone with flu will have a fever)
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- fatigue
- sometimes diarrhea and vomiting

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## What should I do if I get sick?

Most people with the flu have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. If you get sick with flu symptoms, in most cases, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people except to get medical care.

If, however, you have symptoms of flu and are very sick or worried about your illness, contact your health care provider (i.e., your doctor, physician's assistant, etc.).

Certain people are at greater risk of serious flu-related complications (including young children, elderly persons, pregnant women, and people with certain long-term medical conditions; for full list, see [People at High Risk of Developing Flu-Related Complications](#)). If you are in a high risk group and develop flu symptoms, it's best to contact your doctor. Remind them about your high risk status for flu.

Health care providers will determine whether influenza testing and possible treatment are needed. Your doctor may prescribe antiviral drugs that can treat the flu. These drugs work better for treatment the sooner they are started.

## Do I need to go the emergency room if I am only a little sick?

No. The emergency room should be used for people who are very sick. You should not go to the emergency room if you are only mildly ill. If you get sick with flu symptoms and are at high risk of flu complications or you are concerned about your illness, call your doctor for advice. If it's after hours, you can visit a local retail health clinic or urgent care center. Login to [anthem.com](#) and click "Find a Doctor" to find an ER alternative near you. If you go to the emergency room and you are not sick with the flu, you risk catching it from people who do have it.

For more information on this flu, visit [www.flu.gov](#).