

# KEY FACTS ABOUT INFLUENZA AND THE INFLUENZA VACCINE

## WHERE TO GET VACCINATED

The Pueblo City-County Health Department recommends you contact your doctor to schedule an appointment for a flu shot. If you do not have a doctor, or your doctor does not have influenza vaccine, call



for the latest information on clinics in Pueblo County.

This referral hotline is available Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

## What is Influenza (also called Flu)?

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. The best way to prevent this illness is by getting a flu **vaccination** each fall.

In Colorado, flu is the sixth leading cause of death and nationally over 36,000 Americans die each year due to influenza.

Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications.

### COMPLICATIONS OF FLU

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children may get sinus problems and ear infections.

### SYMPTOMS OF FLU

Symptoms include sore throat, fever, and body aches. Influenza is much more severe than a common cold, appearing suddenly and lasting a week or longer.

### HOW FLU SPREADS

Flu viruses spread in respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. They usually spread from person to person, though sometimes people become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Individuals are most contagious two to three days before they show symptoms of flu. **That means that you can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.**



## Prevent the Flu: Get Vaccinated

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each fall. There are two types of vaccines:

- The "flu shot" – an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle. **The flu shot** is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine – a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV for "Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine"). LAIV

is approved for use in healthy people 2 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection. Flu vaccines will not protect against influenza-like illnesses caused by other viruses.

### WHEN TO GET VACCINATED

October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but getting vaccinated in December or even later can still be beneficial. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May.

# WHO SHOULD GET VACCINATED?

In general, **anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting the flu can get vaccinated.** However, it is recommended by Centers for Disease Control and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) that certain people should get vaccinated each year. Persons who are at high risk of having serious flu complications or people who live with or care for those at high risk for serious complications should get a flu shot.

People recommended for vaccination during the 2008-09 flu season are:

- Children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday.
- Pregnant women.
- People 50 years of age and older.
- People of any age with certain long-lasting medical conditions.
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:

- Health care workers.
- Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu.
- Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated).

Of particular concern are healthcare workers. Healthcare workers can unknowingly give flu to their at-risk patients. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, currently only 40 percent of healthcare workers in the United State are vaccinated against influenza.

## OTHER WAYS TO PREVENT FLU

### *Control the Spread of Germs - Wash Your Hands*

The Centers for Disease Control says that hand-washing is the single most important thing we can do to keep from getting sick and spreading disease to others.

When washing your hands, use lots of soap and warm running water. Rub hands together vigorously for at least 15 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used.

### *Cover Your Cough*

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your elbow. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.

### *Stay Home When You Are Sick*

When you are sick or have flu symptoms, stay home, get plenty of rest, and check with a health care provider as needed. The flu is a contagious virus – staying at home when you are sick can prevent the rest of the office from getting sick, too.

### *Other Hints to Keep You Healthy*

- Wipe down your telephone and door knobs with alcohol-based disposable wipes.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Wash your hands often.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat a balanced diet including lots of fruits and vegetables.
- Drink at least eight glasses of water every day.

For more information on the  
2008-09 Flu Season visit the  
Centers for Disease Control and  
Prevention website  
[www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)