

## Entering the flu season.....

Many serious diseases may be prevented by vaccinations or immunizations. Vaccines work to protect infants, children, and adults from illnesses, disease, and death caused by infectious diseases. Influenza (flu) is a contagious disease that is caused by the influenza virus. It can be spread by coughing, sneezing or nasal secretions.

For most people, symptoms of the flu last only a few days and include:

- ❖ Sore throat
- ❖ Fever
- ❖ Cough
- ❖ Chills
- ❖ Muscle Aches
- ❖ Headache
- ❖ Fatigue

*Other illness can have similar symptoms and may be mistaken for the flu.*

Some people are at risk for getting sicker than others if they have the flu. The people more at risk are infants, pregnant people, elderly people and people with certain health conditions such as kidney disease, heart disease, lung disease, or a weakened immune system. This is because the flu can cause a high fever and pneumonia and make any existing medical condition worse. In children it can cause diarrhea and seizures. By getting vaccinated, you can protect yourself from the flu and may also avoid spreading the flu to others.

Many ask “why do we need a flu shot every year?” The reason is because the flu viruses are always changing. Every year the vaccine is changed by scientists to match the virus that is most likely to cause the flu that year. It will not prevent illness caused by other viruses. One can expect the flu vaccination to last about one year. It takes about two weeks for full protection to develop after you receive the flu shot. The flu shot is an inactivated (killed) vaccine.

For certain people, there is also a vaccine available that is sprayed into the nostrils that may be taken instead of the shot. This is a live, attenuated (weakened) influenza vaccine. LAIV is recommended only for healthy people **2 through 49 years of age**, who are not pregnant and do not have certain health conditions. The nasal vaccine is not recommended if one has close contact with someone whose immune system is so weak they require care in a protected environment.

Adults and older children need one dose of influenza vaccine each year. Those younger than 9 years of age need two doses to be protected if this is the first year they have received the flu vaccine.

### Everyday actions can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza.

- ◆ Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze (throw the tissue in the trash after you use it).
- ◆ Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- ◆ Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth to avoid spreading germs.
- ◆ Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- ◆ Stay home if you are sick.

The CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) work to make vaccines as safe as possible. Unfortunately, no vaccine is completely safe or effective. Mild, short lasting side effects are not uncommon upon receiving vaccinations. These mild side effects may include general discomfort, a low fever, or soreness where the vaccine was injected. Very rarely, people experience more serious side effects such as an allergic reaction. If someone has a reaction to a vaccine, it is important to get him or her to a doctor right away. Make sure to let your doctor know what happened, the date and time you received the vaccine and when you had the reaction. All significant reactions are reported to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). The doctor, nurse, or health department will file a form to report the reaction.

It is important for you to understand the benefits and the potential risks of the vaccine before you or your child receives it. There have been concerns raised about the risks of receiving vaccinations and some people should not get certain vaccines.

Some tips about receiving vaccinations:

- Talk with your doctor about the benefits and risks for you or your child.
- Keep the immunization records up to date.
- Follow schedules provided to you by your doctor or nurse.
- When traveling abroad, contact a doctor or public health department as early as possible to check on vaccines you may need.

For additional information about vaccines, visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Vaccine\\_Monitoring/Index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Vaccine_Monitoring/Index.html) and [www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Activities/Activities\\_Index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Activities/Activities_Index.html)