

Before and during the flu season, it is important to learn about influenza and how to keep yourself and your family as healthy as possible this winter.

WHAT IS INFLUENZA (THE FLU)?

Influenza is an illness that is caused by a *virus* that can make you feel very sick. Every year in the United States, influenza *epidemics* occur during the winter months. Influenza (the flu) is a viral infection that is very *contagious*. It can spread from person-to-person in *droplets* created by coughing and sneezing. It can also be spread when people cough or sneeze onto their hands, and then touch things. Anyone can get the flu. However, some people can get much sicker. The young, the elderly, and people with chronic heart or lung conditions can get very sick from the flu.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF THE FLU?

Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, chills, muscle aches, and fatigue. In people with CF, influenza can lead to severe *pneumonia*. If you have the flu, you will develop many of the symptoms listed above. Most likely you will feel worse than you do with your usual pulmonary *exacerbation*. It is very important to let your CF care team know if you have flu-like symptoms, as soon as possible.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO PREVENT INFLUENZA?

The CF community and immunization experts have developed the following guidelines to reduce the impact of influenza on the CF community:

Get vaccinated — Each year in October or November, the influenza vaccination, or the ‘flu shot’, is given to people with CF, their family members, and their healthcare providers. This helps to prevent the flu by increasing *immunity* to the current types of the virus. If the close contacts of people with CF receive *vaccine*, they most likely will not get the flu. This will help to protect people with CF from being exposed to the virus. October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but getting vaccinated in December or January is still helpful as flu season can last until the spring.

Flu vaccine spray — You may have heard about the “flu vaccine spray.” This vaccine is sprayed into the

nose. It is only approved for healthy people 5 to 49 years of age. People with any kind of lung disease, like asthma or emphysema, cannot get this type of flu vaccine. However, family members without CF or other lung disease can get the “flu vaccine spray.”

Practice good health habits — Infection control measures can reduce the spread of flu in healthcare settings such as the CF clinic and in community settings such as at school and work. These habits include:

Keep your distance — Avoid close contact with people who are sick (*stay at least 3 feet or an arm’s length away*). When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick.

Stay home — If you are sick, just stay home. You will help prevent others from becoming sick.

Stop the spread — Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Discard the tissue into a waste basket or covered container. Make sure you wash your hands or use hand sanitizers afterwards to prevent spreading the flu to others.

Clean your hands — Clean your hands **often** with soap and water or with alcohol-based hand gel (**especially after coughing, sneezing or respiratory therapy**). This will help protect you and others around you.

Don’t touch — Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that has germs and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth.

Practice other good health habits — Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

Medications — Anti-viral medications are available to treat people when they get the flu. They are most effective if taken within 24 hours of the start of symptoms, so it is important to contact your CF care center as soon as you feel flu-like symptoms. These drugs may help to lessen your symptoms or how long you are ill. They do not prevent you from getting the flu.

*Words that appear in bold italics are defined at the end.

ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS FROM THE “FLU SHOT”?

The flu shot does not give you the flu, because the viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated). The risk of the flu shot causing serious harm is extremely small. However, like any vaccine, you could have mild side effects such as soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given, a low grade fever, or some mild aches. If these problems happen, they will begin shortly after the shot and usually last 1-2 days. If you are allergic to eggs, talk with your doctor about other ways to get the flu vaccine.

WHAT IS AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC?

A *pandemic* is a disease outbreak that occurs around the world. A flu pandemic occurs if a new flu strain emerges for which people have little or no immunity and for which there is no available vaccine. Thus, a flu pandemic could spread easily person-to-person and cause serious illness in many people in many countries in a very short time. It is difficult to predict if and when the next flu pandemic might occur or how severe it could be.

SHOULD WE BE WORRIED ABOUT AVIAN INFLUENZA (THE BIRD FLU)?

There is concern that the avian flu virus (H5N1) could spark a flu pandemic if it evolved into a virus capable of spreading between people. At this time, the avian flu rarely affects people. If it does it is only from direct contact with infected birds or surfaces with germs from the sick birds. Passing the virus between people is very rare. Public health authorities are carefully tracking the activity of bird flu. Your care center and the CF Foundation will keep you updated if the risk of a bird flu pandemic increases.

MORE INFORMATION

We hope that you have found this information useful. To learn more about germs and infection control, you can read the pamphlet: “Respiratory: What You Should Know About Germs” available from your care center or the CF Foundation’s Web site (www.cff.org). Should you have specific questions, please feel free to contact your care center or contact the CF Foundation at 800-FIGHT CF or info@cff.org. For more information on flu, visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Web site (www.cdc.gov/flu) or the World Health Organization’s Web site (www.who.org).

GLOSSARY OF WORDS IN BOLD PRINT

Contagious – Able to be spread from person to person, like an illness

Droplet – A tiny drop of liquid that comes from the mouth, nose or lungs

Epidemics – A disease affecting many people at the same time that spreads from person to person.

Exacerbation – Signs and symptoms that show a need for treatment

Immunity – The body’s ability to protect itself against germs

Pandemic – A disease occurring around the whole world, essentially an epidemic on a worldwide scale.

Pneumonia – An inflammation of the lungs often caused by a bacterial or viral infection

Vaccine – A solution put into the body to build a defense against disease

Virus – A tiny organism that can cause infections