

Influenza (“the flu”) is a sudden, respiratory disease that spreads easily. It is characterized by the sudden onset of fever, body aches, sore throat, headache, tiredness and cough.

Tips for the workplace:

- Employees with symptoms of influenza should not come to work. Excluding ill employees from the work place can help reduce the spread of the illness to other employees. If possible, allowing employees to work from home when ill can help reduce the spread of disease.
- People often catch influenza and other viruses by picking up the virus on their hands, and then touching their nose, eyes, or mouth. Wash hands several times a day, using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC song). Dry hands with paper towels or automatic hand dryers. Restrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and paper towels are available for employee use.
- Influenza is often spread by coughs and sneezes. Make sure disposable tissues are available in work areas for runny noses and sneezing. Individuals should always cover their mouths with their upper arm or a tissue when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their nose. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and then hands should be washed. (If you cannot wash hands, rub hands with an alcohol hand gel).
- Encourage the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer at employee desks. Hand sanitizer is effective in killing germs on hands when they are not visibly soiled. Appropriate times to use hand sanitizer are after coughing, sneezing, or contact with infected surfaces (e.g. contact with a keyboard, phone)
- Employees should be encouraged to contact their physician when they become ill during influenza season. If they are ill with influenza, anti-viral drugs may reduce the severity and length of illness when they are taken early in the illness. Antivirals need to be started within 48 hours of becoming ill to be effective.
- Employees should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, etc.
- Common use surfaces, such as water fountains, door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, desks, etc., should be cleaned frequently with disinfectants. Commercial disinfectants or bleach solutions are appropriate. (Mixing ¼ cup bleach with 1 gallon of water makes bleach solution. This should be mixed fresh daily).

Who should get the influenza vaccine?

It is recommended that everyone get the influenza vaccine however certain people are at risk for developing severe illness or complications from influenza and are strongly encouraged to get the influenza vaccine every year. Those groups include the following:

- persons aged ≥ 2 years with chronic health conditions (e.g. heart and lung disease, asthma, diabetes, etc.);
- residents of long-term--care facilities;
- persons aged ≥ 50 years, especially those over age 65;
- children aged 6--23 months;
- pregnant women;
- health-care personnel who provide direct patient care;
- household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children aged < 6 months.

Any otherwise healthy non-pregnant person aged 5-49 is eligible for the influenza nasal vaccine (FluMist®).