

Striving to educate our members to be more ProActive towards a healthier lifestyle.

## Symptoms

Individuals who contract the flu can experience many different symptoms including:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny/stuffy nose
- Muscle/body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Vomiting or diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. The flu differs from the common cold, being that it usually comes on suddenly and without warning. Influenza is an illness with a wide range of severity. Some people may have mild symptoms while others may have severe, even life-threatening, symptoms. Most patients with influenza recover quite quickly, within a few days or less, while others feel symptoms for up to two weeks. Influenza can also cause complications for individuals, especially for those with other medical issues such as heart disease, diabetes, and asthma. A few of these complications include: pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus infections, and ear infections.

## How does the flu spread?

The flu is extremely contagious and can spread to others as far as six feet away. Experts say the flu virus spreads mainly by droplets created by infected persons sneezing, coughing and even talking. The flu is also known to spread through individuals who come in contact with a surface containing the virus and touch their nose and/or mouth. Preventing the transmission of the virus is challenging, as people can infect others starting one day before their own symptoms start to appear and for up to seven days after symptoms surface. Therefore, those who show little to no symptoms are still capable of transmitting the virus to others without knowing it.

## Prevention

There are many steps one can take to prevent the flu. First and foremost, stay away from individuals who are sick and stay home if you are feeling ill. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water and/or use hand sanitizer or other alcohol-based hand rubs. Avoid sharing eating utensils, dishes, and even linens with those who are sick. Be sure to thoroughly wash these items as well as surfaces frequently touched. One of the best ways you can protect yourself from the flu is to get vaccinated with a flu shot every year. There are many locations



that offer flu vaccines right near you! Your family doctor's office, clinics, health departments, college health centers, and even some employers offer the flu vaccine. The local retail pharmacy typically offers flu shots with no appointment needed, and also saves you a co-pay from your primary care physician.

The severity and duration of the flu season varies each year with most cases occurring during the winter. You should get vaccinated against the flu once the new vaccine becomes available, preferably by October. The vaccination can take up to two weeks to develop the antibodies that protect against the flu, therefore the sooner you receive the vaccination the better. The seasonal flu vaccines will protect individuals against what is believed to be the most common strain in the upcoming flu season.

### **High Dose Vaccination**

Traditionally, influenza vaccines were designed to protect the body against three types of flu virus and were termed "trivalent vaccines". More recently, "quadrivalent vaccines" have been developed in order to provide protection against four different strains of the flu virus. Quadrivalent vaccines have been shown to be just as safe as their trivalent counterparts, while providing additional coverage. One quadrivalent vaccine can be used in children as young as six months old, while others can be given to people aged 3 years and up. However, if a quadrivalent vaccine is not available at a location near you, do not delay getting vaccinated as trivalent vaccines are still effective and beneficial for your health. Similarly, a high-dose flu vaccine has been created to provide better protection for those aged 65 and older. This is because our immune systems weaken as we age, which puts us at greater risk for severe illnesses and infections. Compared to regular flu vaccines, the high-dose vaccine contains four times the amount of antigen, which is the part of the vaccine that makes our immune systems stronger. The high-dose vaccine is a safe and effective option for older patients who have not had a severe reaction to a flu vaccine in the past.

### **Treatment**

If you do get the flu, check with your doctor to see if you are at a high risk for complications. Common criteria for high-risk patients include: those with asthma, adults 65 years and older, pregnant women, and children under the age of five, but this is not an all-inclusive list. Once your doctor is aware, you may be prescribed an antiviral medication. Antiviral agents have been found to work best when taken within two days of becoming ill, so it's important to make your doctor aware as soon as possible. Antivirals can lower the severity of symptoms and shorten the time that you are sick by 1-2 days. These medications can also prevent serious complications in high-risk individuals. An antiviral agent commonly prescribed for the flu goes by the name of oseltamivir, or Tamiflu, and comes as a pill that should be taken twice daily with food for at least five days. Tamiflu may cause some side effects, including nausea, vomiting, and headaches, but these effects aren't too common. Tamiflu is safe to use in children and pregnant women, and is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to treat the flu in those aged 2 weeks and older. Antivirals are an effective treatment for the flu, but they should not take the place of an annual flu vaccination.

As the weather gets colder and we enter into flu season, we encourage you to be ProActive about your health and wellness by getting your flu shot!

Sincerely,

Your ProAct Team

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