

Talks **ZONE**

**Safety Talks
direct to your
Inbox!**
T4211

Get ready for the flu season

The start of flu season is just around the corner, and now is a good time to think about how to avoid catching or spreading this very common disease.

Influenza — the flu — is a respiratory infection caused by a virus. Various strains of the virus circulate throughout the world, causing local outbreaks year-round. In northern climates, flu season usually runs from November to April, and although most people recover completely, some — mostly seniors — die from pneumonia related to flu or other serious complications.

Symptoms of most flu strains include a fever (often high), cough, body aches, headaches, fatigue and runny or stuffy nose. Vomiting and diarrhea can also occur.

The influenza virus spreads through droplets from someone who coughs or sneezes into the air. You can become infected by breathing in these droplets through your nose or mouth, or through the droplets landing directly on your eyes.

The flu virus is also found on the hands of people with the flu and on surfaces they have touched. You can become infected if you shake hands with infected persons or touch contaminated surfaces, which can transfer the virus to your own eyes, nose or mouth.

Immunization is one of the most effective ways to protect against influenza. This involves injection of a vaccine (sometimes called a shot) containing a dead or severely weakened virus to help the body learn how to fight off the virus if exposed to it.

Some people should get vaccinated each year. They are:

- Children ages six months to 19 years.
- Pregnant women.
- People 50 years of age and older.
- People with certain chronic medical conditions.



- People who live in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities.
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from the flu.

Certain groups should not be vaccinated. These include children under six months of age and people who have had a severe allergic reaction to eggs or a previous dose of the vaccine.

The flu vaccine cannot cause influenza. The most common side effect is soreness at the site of injection, which may last a couple of days. Fever, fatigue and muscle aches might occur within six to 12 hours after the shot, and these effects may last a day or two.

Some people develop a condition called “oculo-respiratory syndrome” after a flu shot. The symptoms include red eyes and respiratory effects such as cough, wheezing, chest tightness, difficulty breathing, or sore throat. In most cases, the symptoms are mild and disappear within 48 hours.

Severe allergic reactions to flu shots are rare. A possible side effect of influenza vaccination is Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS). This is an autoimmune disease that

attacks the nervous system and results in weakness and abnormal sensations. Most patients recover fully. The chance of developing GBS as a result of a flu shot is estimated at one in a million.

To prevent the spread of influenza virus, and other infectious disease, the following are recommended:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water, or use hand sanitizer.
- Cough and sneeze into your arm or sleeve.
- Keep common areas and shared items clean and disinfected.

If you catch the flu keep doing what you normally do, but stay home if you are sick. It's important to remain at home until 24 hours after the fever is gone (without the use of fever reducing medications) and to avoid contact with other people.

Here are some more recovery measures:

- Increase the amount of fluids you drink (water, juice, soups) and get plenty of rest for seven to 10 days.
- Talk to a health professional if you experience severe flu-like symptoms.
- There are medications to treat influenza. Called antiviral drugs, they are not a substitute for vaccination but are an important treatment option if you do get the flu.

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that keep flu viruses from reproducing in the body. They can make the illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. Antiviral drugs work best if started within two days of symptom onset.

The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.

- Influenza is a respiratory disease caused by bacteria.
TRUE ____ FALSE ____
- Can you catch the flu by shaking someone's hand?
YES ____ NO ____
- Vaccination against the flu is a good idea for:
 - Children aged six months to 19 years.
 - People with chronic medical conditions.
 - People 50 years of age and older.
 - People who live in long-term care facilities.
 - All of the above
- Those who have had severe allergic reaction to eggs should not get a flu shot.
TRUE ____ FALSE ____
- Which of these measures help prevent the spread of flu:
 - Thorough washing of hands.
 - Taking two Aspirin tablets.
 - Keeping common areas and shared items clean.
 - Coughing and sneezing into your arm or sleeve.
- Flu victims should stay home for at least 24 hours after fever has gone.
TRUE ____ FALSE ____
- Prescription medications that help ease the symptoms of flu are called:
 - Pills.
 - Anticoagulants.
 - Antivirals.
 - Analgesics.
- Do you have a good reason for not being vaccinated against influenza?
YES ____ NO ____ DON'T KNOW ____

ANSWERS: 1. False, 2. Yes, 3. E, 4. True, 5. A, 6. True, 7. C, 8. Your answer

Hold These Thoughts

People are exposed to different strains of the influenza virus many times during their lives. Even though the virus changes, their previous bouts of influenza may offer some protection against infection caused by a similar strain of the virus. However, three to four times each century, for unknown reasons, a radical change takes place in the influenza A virus, causing a new strain to emerge.

Since there is no protection against the new strain, it can spread rapidly around the world, causing what is known as a pandemic. Frequently, the pandemic influenza virus causes severe complications, such as pneumonia and death in previously healthy individuals. The last three pandemics occurred in 1918-19, 1957-58 and 1968-69.

Vaccines are the first line of defense against a pandemic, but it could take at least six months to produce the vaccine for a new virus. This complex process cannot begin until the pandemic begins and the new virus has been identified.

There is a global effort to develop prototype pandemic vaccines, including H5N1 vaccines, as part of pandemic preparedness.

The annual flu shot only covers the strains of human influenza that are expected to be in circulation during that year's flu season. While getting a flu shot each year is the most effective way to avoid getting seasonal flu, it will not provide protection from any new influenza strain that emerges to create a pandemic.



Safety Meeting

For the Record

Date of Meeting: _____

Topic: _____

Location: _____

Department: _____

Start Time: _____ Finish Time: _____

Meeting Leader: _____

In Attendance:

Tips for Safety Meeting Leaders

Optional training methods. There are times when it is not feasible to gather employees for group training sessions. This can create situations where some employees will miss out and get behind. One method to assure complete training coverage is to make individual copies of the training topic for the week and include it in the employee's pay envelope. This allows the employee to study at his or her own leisure and jot down questions on the subject.

This is an important part of your job. When supervisory personnel get asked to run a safety meeting and have never done so before, their immediate reaction is often that they're no good at public speaking and wouldn't know what to say. But safety training

is valuable for you and your team. You must provide adequate instruction and guidance — and teaching safety is part of that job. Fortunately, you don't have to be a professional speaker to deliver an effective safety talk, but you do have to do some planning.

Encourage discussion and questions. Answer to the best of your knowledge. Get more information where necessary. In fact, encourage it by asking questions. For example, you can kick off the meeting by describing an incident and then asking for workers' suggestions on how it might have been avoided. However, don't let the meeting get out of control. Keep it on track, and make sure it doesn't turn into a general gripe session.

Note: *TalksZone* safety meetings are not intended to take the place of your own safety procedures. Always consult and/or review your procedures before attempting any work.