YOUR BEST SHOT FOR A FLU FREE SEASON
Q & A: Flu? • Get the Facts Straight

WHAT IS SEASONAL INFLUENZA (FLU)?
Seasonal influenza, more commonly called the flu, is a highly contagious respiratory illness that may affect up to 20 percent of the population annually. They are primarily caused by two different types of influenza viruses: A and B. Influenza A is the cause of epidemic and pandemic influenza, and influenza B usually causes a milder illness that occurs throughout the year.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF THE FLU?
The flu can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The flu is different from a cold. The flu usually comes on suddenly. A common chief complaint by patients is, “I feel like I’ve been hit or run over by a truck.” Symptoms include a 100°F or higher fever, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, throbbing headaches, eyes red and watery, muscle aches, chills, exhaustion and fatigue. Regarding seniors, they may present differently with high fever, nasal blockage, confusion, and lethargy. While children may have more nausea, vomiting and diarrhea associated with sore throat and a runny or stuffy nose.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A COLD AND THE FLU?
Both are respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. The flu generally is worse than the common cold and can cause death. Symptoms of the flu, like fever, muscle aches, extreme tiredness and dry cough, are more common and intense. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose and no fever. Colds usually do not result in serious health issues like pneumonia, bacterial infections or hospitalizations which are seen with the flu.

HOW DOES THE FLU SPREAD?
Mainly person to person in respiratory droplets produced by the coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. You also can become infected by touching surfaces with flu viruses on it and then touching your mouth or nose.

WHEN IS THE FLU SEASON IN THE UNITED STATES?
The timing of flu is very unpredictable and can vary in different parts of the country and from season to season. Flu activity most commonly peaks in the U.S. between December and February. However, seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October and continue to occur as late as May.

DOES THE FLU HAVE COMPLICATIONS?
Yes. In the absence of complications, flu symptoms gradually improve over 2 to 5 days. But when symptoms fail to resolve within several days and a patient has a high fever and shortness of breath, viral or bacterial pneumonia should be suspected. Children can get sinus problems, ear infections and seizures as complications from the flu.

Alert: Aspirin and aspirin containing medications (PeptoBismol) should never be given to a person under the age of 18 because aspirin can lead to a condition called Reye’s syndrome which results in liver failure.

(see reverse)
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WHO IS AT HIGH RISK FOR INFLUENZA?
Most people who get the flu will have mild illness, will not need medical care or antiviral drugs, and will recover in less than two weeks. Some people, however, are more likely to get flu complications that result in being hospitalized and occasionally result in death. Pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus infections and ear infections all are flu-related complications. Groups of people who are at high risk to get flu-related complications include children younger than 5 years of age, pregnant women, people 65 and older, persons with certain medical conditions such as chronic lung disorders like asthma, heart disease, diabetes, immunosuppressed conditions (HIV or transplantation) and certain other conditions.

HOW LONG IS A PERSON WITH FLU VIRUS CONTAGIOUS?
Once the influenza virus enters your body through the nose, mouth or eyes, symptoms normally begin within two to four days. Unfortunately, you can become contagious and able to spread the flu to others a day or so BEFORE you show symptoms. You remain contagious up to a week after symptoms begin, with the virus most easily spread during the first days of illness while your fever is highest. Children remain contagious longer than adults do, often for more than a week.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AND MY CHILD FROM THE FLU?
A flu vaccine is the best way to protect against influenza, also called the flu. The CDC recommends a flu vaccine for everyone 6 months and older.

You should stay away from sick people and frequently wash your hands with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Cover any cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow, and not your hands, as you’ll spread germs to any surface you touch. Use antibacterial wipes to disinfect frequently used surfaces and items in your household or at work, such as phones, computer keyboards, TV remotes, fridge, microwave and door handles, toilet and sink handles and toys.

If you are sick with flu, stay home from work or school to prevent spreading flu to others.

WHAT ARE THE EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS OF INFLUENZA?
In children, if they exhibit shortness of breath, fast breathing, or trouble breathing, blue or purplish skin color; not drinking enough fluids, not waking up easily or not interacting, being so irritable that the child does not want to be held and flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with high fever and worse cough, fever with a rash.

In addition to the signs above, get medical help right away for any infant who has any of these signs, being unable to eat, has trouble breathing, has no tears when crying, significantly fewer wet diapers than normal.

In adults if they have difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, pain or pressure in the chest or stomach, dizziness when standing or not passing urine, confusion, severe or persistent vomiting, or flu-like symptoms that improve, but then return with high fever and worse cough.

For more information call CDC info at 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) or go to www.cdc.gov/flu.