

How to Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones Against Seasonal Flu, Avian Flu (Bird Flu) or Any Cough Illness

What is the flu?

Influenza, known as flu, is a very contagious disease of the respiratory (breathing) system. The flu is caused by a virus that is easily passed from one person to another by coughing and sneezing. For most people, the flu makes them feel very sick, but they generally get better in about a week. However, young children, people older than 65 years of age, pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions can have serious complications from the flu. These complications can include pneumonia and worsening of medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, or asthma.

The following tips can help protect you and your loved ones during the regular flu season, as well as from the threat of bird flu or any other cough illness.

Get flu vaccine every year.

The best way to prevent the flu is to get flu vaccine every year. There are 2 flu vaccines:

- The "flu shot" is an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle. **The flu shot** is for everyone 6 months of age and older, including pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine, called FluMist, is made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu. **FluMist** is for healthy people 2 to 49 years old who are not pregnant.

The flu vaccine that you get every year does not protect you against bird flu.

Ask your health care provider if you should get pneumococcal vaccine.

Pneumococcal vaccine (pneumonia shot) may be recommended for you if you have a medical condition like diabetes, heart or lung disease, or a weak immune system, or if you are 65 years of age or older.

Wash your hands.

Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health recommends that you do **not** keep supplies of antiviral medications, such as Tamiflu[®], at home.

For more information about influenza visit www.mass.gov/dph/flu, or call the MDPH Immunization Program at **617-983-6800** or **888-658-2850**

Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.

Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the inside of your elbow. Throw tissues away and wash your hands.

Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

This decreases the chance that you will get the flu virus or other germs into your body, or that you will pass the flu to others.

Clean things that are touched often.

Clean things that are touched often, such as door or refrigerator handles, computer key boards/mouse, phones and water faucets.

Avoid contact with people who are sick.

Avoid unnecessary holding, kissing or sharing food, dishes and glasses with anyone who has a cold or the flu. People with young children, weak immune system or a chronic illness should avoid large crowds, if possible.

Avoid contact with birds when visiting countries that have bird flu.

Find out about bird flu and travel at:

<http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/content/AvianFluInformation.aspx>

How to Take Care of Someone with the Flu and When to Seek Medical Care

Supplies to have on hand:

- A thermometer that does not contain mercury
- Non-aspirin pain relievers such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, etc.)
- Cough syrup for older children and adults
- Drinks – fruit juice, sports drinks`
- Light food – clear soups, crackers, applesauce, popsicles
- Phone number of family health care provider

Symptoms of the flu include:

- Fever (101° – 104°), lasting 3 – 5 days
- Headache, severe muscle and joint aches
- Sore throat
- Tiredness, can be extreme and last 2 weeks or more
- Dry cough
- Runny or stuffy nose

What to do if you have flu symptoms:

- Rest in bed
- Drink lots of fluids (water or juice)
- Take non-aspirin pain relievers to reduce fever and pain (Never give aspirin to children or teens with fever - they can get a serious disease called Reye syndrome.)
- Stay home and avoid public activities for at least 5 days (7 days for children), so that you don't pass the flu to other people

If you are at risk for complications from the flu, call a health care provider as soon as you have flu-like symptoms.

People at risk for complications from the flu include:

- Infants and young children
- People 65 years of age and older
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic medical conditions such heart or lung disease, diabetes and people whose immune system is weakened because of disease or medicine.

Call for help immediately if:

- Breathing is fast, difficult or painful
- The skin is dusky or bluish in color
- The person has chest pain
- The person is disoriented
- The person is unable to walk or sit up, or function normally (others might be the first to notice this, especially in elderly people)

Call a health care provider if:

- The fever lasts more than 3 - 5 days
- The fever or cough goes away for 24 hours or more, and then returns
- There is colored mucous with the cough
- The person is not able to drink enough fluids (urine is dark or has not urinated for 12 or more hours)

Call a health care provider if your child or the person you are caring for has any of the symptoms above, or if he or she:

- Still “acts sick” once the fever is gone
- Looks very sick or is unusually drowsy or fussy
- Has a stiff neck, severe headache, severe sore throat, severe earache or unexplained rash, or has repeated vomiting or diarrhea
- Has a fever and has had a seizure
- Gets the flu and has a weakened immune system because of disease or medicine.

If you visit an area with bird flu, call a health care provider right away if:

- You get a fever and cough, or have difficulty breathing, within 10 days of returning from an area with bird flu.
- You develop these problems after contact with a sick person who has recently traveled to an area with bird flu.

Be prepared to tell the health care provider about your symptoms, where you traveled, and if you had close contact with poultry.