

# Facts About Influenza for Adults

## What is influenza?

Influenza, sometimes called the “flu”, is a highly contagious viral infection of the nose, throat and lungs that ranks as one of the most severe illnesses of the winter season. Influenza is spread easily from person to person primarily when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Influenza may lead to hospitalization or even death, especially among the elderly. An estimated 10% to 20% of the population contract influenza annually.

## What are the symptoms of influenza?

Typical influenza illness is characterized by abrupt onset of high fever, chills, a dry cough, headache, runny nose, sore throat, and muscle and joint pain. Unlike other common respiratory infections, influenza can cause extreme fatigue lasting several days to weeks.

## How is influenza prevented?

There is a vaccine to protect against influenza. Because the influenza virus changes from year to year, it is important to get vaccinated against influenza on a yearly basis. The influenza vaccine protects you against the three strains of influenza expected to be the most prevalent each year. **The 2000-2001 vaccine includes A/Moscow, A/New Caledonia and B/Beijing. Flu Shots will not protect all persons from getting influenza, but should at least decrease the severity of the illness.**

## Who should get influenza vaccine?

- ä Anyone who smokes tobacco products.
- ä People 50 years of age and older.
- ä People with chronic disorders of the lungs or heart.
- ä People who are less able to fight infections because of a disease or treatment with drugs; including infection with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), treatment with drugs such as long-term steroid therapy; and/or treatment for cancer with x-rays or drugs.
- ä People who have required regular medical follow-up or hospitalization during the preceding year because of chronic diseases (including diabetes mellitus), kidney diseases, and blood cell diseases such as sickle cell anemia.
- ä Women who are in the second or third trimester of pregnancy.
- ä Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities housing anyone of any age with chronic medical conditions.
- ä Health care workers and others in contact with people in high-risk groups. Teenagers who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and might be at risk for developing Reye syndrome after influenza.

- Anyone who wishes to reduce their chance of catching influenza, particularly those who provide essential community services.

## Is the vaccine safe?

You cannot get influenza from the vaccine. The vaccine is very safe and effective and generally has few side effects. There may be some soreness, redness or swelling where the shot is given. Other possible mild side effects include a headache and low-grade fever for a day after the vaccination. As with any medicine, there are very small risks that an allergic reaction, or even death, could occur after getting a vaccine. However, the risks from the disease are much greater than the risks from the vaccine.

**THE VACCINE CANNOT CAUSE INFLUENZA. RESPIRATORY ILLNESS AFTER VACCINATION IS COINCIDENTAL AND UNRELATED TO THE VACCINE.**

## Do not take the shot if:

- You have a severe allergy to Thimerosal, eggs, or chicken feathers/dander.
- You have ever had Guillian Barre Syndrome.
- You have ever had a severe reaction to a flu shot.
- You have a fever. (Delay the shot until the fever is gone).
- Check with your doctor if you are pregnant or nursing.

## Questions:

If you have any questions about influenza or influenza vaccination ask now or call your physician or local Department of Health before requesting the vaccine.

## Reactions:

If you become ill and visit a doctor, hospital or clinic in the four weeks after today's shot please report this to:

**Pomperaug District Department of Health  
800 Main Street South  
Southbury, CT  
203-264-9616**