

# Seasonal Influenza

## FACT SHEET

### **What is seasonal influenza?**

Seasonal influenza is a respiratory illness caused by a virus. It causes mild to severe illness in most cases, but can lead to death. Each year about 5-20% of the U.S. population will get sick with seasonal influenza. About 36,000 of those people will die.

### **What are the symptoms of seasonal influenza?**

Symptoms of seasonal influenza may include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. Symptoms can appear one to four days after you are exposed to the illness, but usually start about two days after you are exposed. Symptoms usually start suddenly, not gradually as they do with a cold. Children may also have gastrointestinal symptoms, like stomach cramping, vomiting, nausea and diarrhea. They may also develop sinus problems and ear infections.

### **When does seasonal influenza strike?**

Seasonal influenza usually occurs between October and April, but can last into May.

### **How is seasonal influenza spread?**

Influenza is spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets, usually when an infected person coughs or sneezes on another person. It can also be spread on contaminated objects, such as doorknobs, faucets, telephones and light switches. Most healthy adults can spread the flu one day before their symptoms develop, and five days after becoming sick.

### **Who is at risk for getting seasonal influenza?**

Everyone is at risk, but some people are more likely to develop severe illness or complications. Senior adults, young children and people with certain health conditions are more likely to get complications from the flu. They may develop bacterial pneumonia or dehydration, or an existing chronic medical condition may get worse.

### **How can I protect myself from seasonal influenza?**

The best way to protect yourself from seasonal influenza is to get a flu shot each year. Flu viruses change from year to year. Each year a new vaccine is created, based on the strain of influenza experts expect to see in the population. Also, immunity from the shot weakens over time, so the vaccination you received last year may not protect you again this year. The flu shot is an inactivated vaccine (containing dead virus). It is approved for infants 6 months and older and healthy children and adults. You cannot get the flu from the flu shot. Two weeks after you get the flu shot your body will create antibodies that will protect you against seasonal influenza virus. The vaccine will not protect you against illnesses caused by other viruses.

### **How can I help prevent the spread of seasonal influenza?**

You can prevent the spread of influenza by getting an annual flu shot. You can also protect yourself and protect others by practicing good health habits like frequent hand washing with soap and water, covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and avoiding contact with people who are sick. Also, be sure to stay home when you are ill to avoid spreading your germs to others.

### **Are there people who should not get a flu shot?**

Yes. People who are allergic to eggs, have had an allergic reaction to flu shots in the past, or have developed Guillain-Barré syndrome within 6 weeks of getting a flu shot should not be vaccinated against flu. Children less than 6 months old and people who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should not be vaccinated.