

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



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Influenza Season

While flu spreads every year, the timing, severity, and length of the season usually varies from one season to another. It's not possible to predict what this flu season will be like. Flu seasons are unpredictable in a number of ways.



Will new flu viruses circulate this season?

Flu viruses are constantly changing so it's not unusual for new flu viruses to appear each year. The timing of flu is very unpredictable and can vary 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.



What should we do to prepare for this flu season?

CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months of age and older as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease. While there are many different flu viruses, the seasonal flu vaccine is designed to protect against the main flu viruses that research suggests will cause the most illness during the upcoming flu season. People should begin getting vaccinated soon after flu vaccine becomes available, ideally by October, to ensure that as many people as possible are protected before flu season begins.

In addition to getting vaccinated, you can take everyday preventive actions like staying away from sick people and washing your hands to reduce the spread of germs. If you are sick with flu, stay home from

work or school to prevent spreading flu to others.

What should we do to protect our loved ones from flu this season?

Encourage your loved ones to get vaccinated as soon as vaccine becomes available in their communities, preferably by October. Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk for serious flu complications, and their close contacts. Children between 6 months and 8 years of age may need two doses of flu vaccine to be fully protected from flu. Your child's doctor or other health care professional can tell you whether your child needs two doses.

Children younger than 6 months are at higher risk of serious flu complications, but are too young to get a flu vaccine. Because of this,

(Over)

Influenza Season *(Continued)*

safeguarding them from flu is especially important. If you live with or care for an infant younger than 6 months of age, you should get a flu vaccine to help protect them from flu.

In addition to getting vaccinated, you and your loved ones can take everyday preventive actions like staying away from sick people and washing your hands to reduce the spread of germs. If you are sick with flu, stay home from work or school to prevent spreading influenza to others. Doctors and nurses are encouraged to begin vaccinating their patients soon after vaccine becomes available. Those children 6 months through 8 years of age who need two doses of vaccine should receive the first dose as soon as possible to allow time to get the second dose before the start of flu season. The two doses should be given at least 4 weeks apart.

What kind of vaccines will be available in the United States for 2014-2015?

A number of different manufacturers produce trivalent (three component) influenza vaccines for the U.S. market, including intramuscular

(IM), intradermal, and nasal spray vaccines. Some seasonal flu vaccines will be formulated to protect against four flu viruses (quadrivalent flu vaccines).

Flu vaccines are designed to protect against the main flu viruses that research suggests will be the most common during the upcoming season. Three kinds of flu viruses commonly circulate among people today: Influenza A (H1N1) viruses, influenza A (H3N2) viruses, and influenza B viruses.

All of the 2014-2015 influenza vaccine is made to protect against the following three viruses:

- an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1) pdm09-like virus
- an A/Texas/50/2012 (H3N2)-like virus
- a B/Massachusetts/2/2012-like virus.

Some of the 2014-2015 flu vaccine also protects against an additional B virus (B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus).

Vaccines that give protection against three viruses are called trivalent vaccines. Vaccines that give protection against four viruses are called quadrivalent vaccines.

It's not possible to predict with certainty if the vaccine will be a good match for circulating viruses. The vaccine is made to protect against the flu viruses that research indicates will likely be most common during the season. However, experts must pick which viruses to include in the vaccine many months in advance in order for vaccine to be produced and delivered on time. And flu viruses change constantly (called drift); they can change from one season to the next or they can even change within the course of one flu season. Because of these factors, there is always the possibility of a less than optimal match between circulating viruses and the viruses in the vaccine.

Over the course of the flu season, CDC studies samples of circulating flu viruses to evaluate how close a match there is between viruses used to make the vaccine and circulating viruses.

One of the ways that helps CDC evaluate the match between vaccine viruses and circulating viruses is with a lab process called 'antigenic characterization'. Results of antigenic characterization testing are published weekly by the CDC.

Benefits Corner

Reminder:

County Health Pool covers flu shots at 100% up to the reasonable and customary amount. To obtain a flu shot claim form, log onto www.ctsi.org, click pools/CHP/useful documents/claim forms.

You will only receive a new ID card if you made a Plan change for 2015 Open Enrollment. Please contact CHP at 303 861-0507 if you have any issues with receiving an ID card.