

## Preventing the flu during the 2004-2005 flu season

Influenza, or the flu, is an infection of the respiratory system caused by the influenza virus. The disease is spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Symptoms include: fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. Children often experience nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea.

Each year about 10-20 percent of the population gets the flu. For most healthy people, the flu is a moderately severe illness which lasts about a week. For the elderly, young children and people with other health issues, the flu can be very severe or even fatal. Each year about 200,000 Americans are hospitalized and 36,000 people die from the flu.

### Who should get a flu shot this year?

Generally, the best way to protect yourself from the flu is to get a flu shot each year. This year, however, because there is a shortage of flu vaccines, only individuals who are considered at high risk for complications of the flu should get the flu shot. These high risk people include:

- Children aged 6 months to 23 months.
- People aged 65 or older.
- People who have an underlying long-term illness.
- Women who will be pregnant this flu season.
- People who live in nursing homes or other chronic-care patients.
- Children aged 2 to 18 who take aspirin daily.
- Health-care workers who take care of patients.
- People who take care of a baby under 6 months old.

### What can I do to avoid getting the flu?

Here are some tips to help you avoid getting the flu:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If you don't have water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

- Keep your hands away from your face. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze. Preferably, cough or sneeze into a tissue and throw the tissue away. Wash your hands after coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Practice healthy habits. Get plenty of sleep, exercise, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food to help you stay healthy during the flu season and all year long.

### What should I do if I get the flu?

Here are some suggestions for surviving the flu:

- See your doctor within two days of the start of symptoms. Your doctor may be able to prescribe antiviral medication to reduce the severity and the length of your illness.
- Over-the-counter medications, such as acetaminophen or decongestants, can minimize discomfort associated with flu symptoms. These drugs, however, do not treat the viral infection.
- Drink plenty of liquids to keep hydrated.
- Get adequate nutrition and bed rest to aid recovery.
- Avoid spreading the flu. Stay home from work, school or public places when you are sick to avoid infecting others.

For more information, contact CTSI at 303-861-0507.