

How serious can the flu be?

Even though it's March and we should be nearing the end of flu season, you should still take the flu very seriously. The flu can make anyone sick, but certain groups are very vulnerable to the flu—infants, young children, and the elderly—and who should make sure to get a flu vaccine. It's also very important for those who provide care, such as child care providers, health care providers, and others, to get their flu shots to protect those who are vulnerable.

Here's what you'll find in this newsletter:

- Three things you should remember about the flu
- How you can stay healthy
- What types of flu vaccine are available
- Where you can find more information about the flu

**Questions? Contact the
Arkansas Department of Health
at 501-661-2169 or
www.healthy.arkansas.gov.**

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You should remember 3 important facts about the flu—it's serious, contagious, and deadly.

The flu is serious.

Most people believe that the flu is just like a cold. Some will say to themselves, “I’ll only be sick with a stuffy nose and cough for a few days and recover quickly.” This may or may not be true. No one can tell how serious the flu will be for one person compared to another. Some people may be sick only a few days, and others could be sick for up to two weeks.

Symptoms of the flu are similar to those someone might feel if they have a cold, but, in general, the flu is worse than a cold. With the flu, fever, body aches, fatigue, and dry cough are more common and intense than with a cold. Those with a cold are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose, and colds are usually minor.¹

The flu is contagious.

The flu spreads quickly and easily from person to person. Someone who is contagious doesn’t even have to feel sick! Most adults can spread the flu to others starting 1 day before they feel any symptoms and up to 7 days after becoming sick. Children can spread the flu for longer than 7 days. The average person does not start to feel sick until 1 to 4 days after the flu virus enters the body. You can spread the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.²

Many people die every year from the flu—adults and children. To read or listen to some of these personal stories, visit www.shotbyshot.org or www.facesofinfluenza.org.

The flu is deadly.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), each year on average 5 to 20 percent of Americans get the flu, more than 200,000 are hospitalized due to complications, and between 3,000 and 49,000 die. The flu can worsen the problems that chronic diseases cause. The flu can also cause pneumonia, dehydration, sinus and ear infections, and other problems.³

What can I do to stay healthy?⁴

- **Get a flu vaccine every year.** It’s the best way to keep from getting the flu, and it cannot make you sick. The CDC recommends that people aged 6 months and older get a flu vaccine.
- Stay away from those who are sick. If you get sick, stay home from work or school.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or with your elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- If you do get the flu, take flu antiviral drugs prescribed by your doctor to treat it.

Visit flushot.healthmap.org to find out where you can get a flu vaccine.

What types of flu vaccine are there?⁵

There are two types of vaccines: the flu shot and the nasal spray.

- The flu shot is made from killed flu viruses (inactivated). People who are 6 months of age or older, including those with chronic conditions like asthma, diabetes, and COPD can get the flu shot.
- The nasal spray is made from live but weakened flu viruses. The spray can be used with people between the ages of 2 and 49 years who are not pregnant and do not have any conditions that can be complicated by the flu.

Where can I find more information?

If you are interested in learning more about the flu, flu vaccines, and what you can do to prevent the flu, visit one of these organizations' websites:

- US Department of Health and Human Services (www.flu.gov)
- CDC (www.cdc.gov/flu)

If you have any questions, please contact the Arkansas Department of Health by calling 501-661-2169 or visiting their website at www.healthy.arkansas.gov.

Sources:

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cold Versus Flu Questions and Answers. *Seasonal Influenza (Flu)*. Retrieved January 28, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/coldflu.htm>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. How Flu Spreads. *Seasonal Influenza (Flu)*. Retrieved January 28, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/spread.htm>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Seasonal Influenza: Q&A. *Seasonal Influenza (Flu)*. Retrieved December 10, 2012, from <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/disease.htm>

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Says "Take 3" Actions to Fight The Flu. *Seasonal Influenza (Flu)*. Retrieved December 11, 2012, from <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/preventing.htm>

⁵ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Vaccination & Vaccine Safety. *Prevention and Vaccination*. Retrieved January 28, 2013 from <http://www.flu.gov/prevention-vaccination/vaccination/index.html#>