

Adventist Healthcare: Health Tip of the Week

The Flu

Every year in the U.S., 5-20 percent of the population gets the flu. More than 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 people die from flu complications.

What is the flu?

- It is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Symptoms include: fever, headache, fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose and muscle aches.
- Most healthy people will suffer a week or two from the flu. Complications include: bacterial pneumonia, and dehydration. Children get sinus problems and ear infections.

How does the flu spread?

- Respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. Occasionally, a person may become infected by touching something with virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose.
- Adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before getting symptoms and up to seven days after getting sick.

What are the flu vaccines?

- The flu shot is an inactivated vaccine that is 70-90 percent effective. Only one-half of the U.S. supply (about 55 million flu shots) will be available this season.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine (LAIV) is made with live, weakened flu viruses and is 86-97 percent effective. About one million doses will be available in the U.S.

Who should get vaccinated?

The priority groups for a flu shot:

- All children 6-23 months
- Adults aged 65 years or older
- Persons aged 2-64 with underlying chronic medical conditions
- All women who will be pregnant during the influenza season
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- Health-care workers involved in direct patient care
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children aged less than six months.

For the nasal-spray vaccine:

- Healthy people 5-49 years of age who are not pregnant.
- According to the CDC, health care workers may be treated with the spray as long as they don't care for severely immunocompromised patients in special care units.

How can the flu be prevented?

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Sources: CDC, Washington Post, USA Today, and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.