

Influenza: Steps to Take Before and After Receiving Vaccine
2 November 2009

Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent influenza. It takes about 2 weeks for adults to develop full immunity. Children under 10 years of age, because they need 2 doses of vaccine 28 days apart, take 6 weeks to develop full immunity.

Vaccine is not effective in everyone, particularly if people have other chronic conditions that interfere with developing an immune response.

Influenza activity is increasing in our community, so before and even after receiving vaccine, plan what you will do if you catch the flu.

First, decide if you are in a group that is at increased risk for complications from influenza. If you are in one of these groups, talk with your doctor ahead of time and plan what you will do if you catch the flu.

- Develop a strategy to avoid delays in starting treatment. One strategy is to ask if you should have a prescription for Tamiflu or Relenza (antivirals) on hand so that you can start this medicine early when you catch the flu. Treatment, when indicated, should be initiated as early as possible because the benefits are greatest when started within the first 2 days of illness. For information for your doctor on antivirals, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/recommendations.htm>
- Ask your doctor if he wants you to talk with him before you fill the prescription for the antiviral medication.
- Ask if you need to be examined if you get flu symptoms.

Groups that are at increased risk for complications are

- Children younger than 2 years old
- People 65 years and older
- Pregnant women and women up to 2 weeks postpartum (including following pregnancy loss);
- Persons younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- People who have:
 - Cancer
 - Blood disorders (including sickle cell disease)
 - Chronic lung disease (including asthma or COPD)
 - Diabetes
 - Heart disease
 - Kidney disorders
 - Liver disorders
 - Neurological disorders (including nervous system, brain or spinal cord)
 - Neuromuscular disorders (including muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis)
 - Weakened immune systems (including people with AIDS)

Second, know when to seek medical care.

Most people with H1N1 flu have had mild illness and have not needed medical care or antiviral drugs and the same is true of seasonal flu. The emergency room should be used for people who are very sick. You should not go to the emergency room if you are only mildly ill.

If you have the emergency warning signs (described below) of flu sickness, you should go to the emergency room. If you get sick with flu symptoms and you are concerned about your illness, call your

health care provider for advice. If you go to the emergency room and you are not sick with the flu, you may catch it from people who do have it.

The **emergency warning signs** that should signal anyone to seek medical care urgently are:

In children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Third, practice every day steps to protect you and our community.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.