

For immediate release: Nov. 26, 2007

Contact: Greg Wilkinson, (907) 269-7285, Cell (907) 382-7032
Ann Potempa, (907) 269-7957, Cell (907) 240-9158

Influenza Immunization Awareness Season: Facts about the flu

What is the flu?

- Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus.
- Infection can range from mild to severe, including life-threatening complications.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

- Symptoms include fever, headache, tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches.
- Gastro-intestinal symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, are much more common among children than adults.

Who is affected?

- Approximately 36,000 people die annually from influenza in the U.S., and more than 200,000 are hospitalized.
- People at highest risk of developing complications associated with the flu include children between 6 months and 5 years of age; people with chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, heart disease, and compromised immune systems; people 50 years of age and older; and pregnant women. Healthcare workers and people who live with or care for persons in these groups also should be vaccinated to decrease the chance of transmitting influenza.
- All Alaskans can be impacted and are encouraged to receive vaccination.

How does the flu spread?

- Generally, influenza virus is transmitted through respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes.
- Scientific studies show that adults are contagious one day before and three to five days after developing symptoms.

When should you receive influenza vaccination?

- Vaccination throughout the influenza season is effective. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May.
- About 2 weeks after vaccination, antibodies that provide protection against influenza virus infection develop in the body.
- If you haven't yet received a flu vaccination, "It's not too late to vaccinate."
- Vaccination even after flu is circulating in a community can be protective.

How can we prevent the flu?

- The single best way to prevent the flu is vaccination every year.
- Peak flu activity in the U.S. usually does not occur until February, so vaccination through the fall and winter is recommended. Influnza activity during the 06-07 season peaked in March 07

Who should not be vaccinated?

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs.
- People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past.
- People who developed Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously.
- Children less than 6 months of age (influenza vaccine is not approved for use in this age group).
- People who have moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait to get vaccinated until their symptoms lessen.

Is vaccine available in Alaska?

- Yes, the Alaska Division of Public Health has distributed more than 90,000 doses of flu vaccine to clinics across the state, and many private providers have purchased additional vaccine.
- No vaccine shortages are anticipated at this time.

Who do I contact to receive influenza vaccination?

- For general information on where influenza vaccinations may be found in your area, visit the American Lung Association, Alaska Chapter Locator at www.flucliniclocator.org, or call your healthcare provider, local public health center, local pharmacy, or the Alaska Immunization Hotline at 269-8088 in Anchorage or 1-888-430-4321.
- Information for the Alaska Immunization Program is also available on the Web at www.epi.alaska.gov/immunize. For general information on the flu go to www.cdc.gov/flu/

#