



Office of Developmental Programs

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Office of the Medical Director

FLU SEASON 2012-2013

The 2011-2012 influenza season was mild compared with recent years, with a lower percentage of outpatient visits for influenza-like illness, lower rates of hospitalizations, and fewer deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza. In fact, the season set a new record for the lowest and shortest peak for influenza-like-illness since this type of surveillance began.

Immunization Rate for 2011-2012 Influenza Season

The overall cumulative percentage *estimate* (Data source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and National Immunization Survey (NIS) for all persons immunized against influenza during the 2011-2012 in Pennsylvania was 43.5%. For those at higher risk, youth and elderly, the immunization estimate ranged from was 77% for those aged 6 months to 4 years and 67.6% for the elderly 65 years and older.

What do I need to know to prepare for the 2012-2013 flu season?

Get immunized against the flu annually.

The CDC still recommends those aged 6 months and older get a flu shot each year preferably in the fall when the vaccine becomes available. However, it is important that some people who are at risk for complications to especially get immunized. These include:

- People who have certain medical conditions including asthma, diabetes, chronic lung disease*, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine, kidney, metabolic and liver disorders
- Pregnant women
- People 65 years and older
- People who have a weakened immune system
- People who live with or care for others who are at high risk of developing serious complications

*This includes household contacts or those caring for people with these conditions.

Why do I need a flu vaccine every year?

A flu vaccine is needed every year because flu viruses are constantly changing. The flu vaccine is formulated each year to keep up with the flu viruses as they change. This year the influenza vaccine is different from the seasonal vaccines for the past two influenza seasons. Although the vaccine for 2012-2013 will include influenza A (H1N1)-like antigen – the same as last season, the influenza A (H3N2)-like and the influenza B type antigens are different.

Also, multiple studies have shown that the body's immunity to influenza viruses (acquired either through natural infection or vaccination) declines over time.

Is there treatment if I get sick with the flu?

Yes. If you get sick, there are drugs that can treat flu illness. They are called antiviral drugs and they can make your illness milder and help you feel better faster. They also can prevent serious flu-related complications, like pneumonia.

To prevent the spread of influenza, practice good personal hygiene: wash your hands frequently, cough or sneeze into your elbow and stay away from people if you or they are ill.

Do I have the flu or a cold?

The flu and the common cold have similar symptoms. Symptoms such as fever, body aches, tiredness, and cough are more common and intense with the flu. Flu symptoms include:

- A 100°F or higher fever or feeling feverish (not everyone with the flu has a fever)
- A cough and/or sore throat
- A runny or stuffy nose
- Headaches and/or body aches
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea (most common in children)

Where can I get more information about flu?

The CDC has a wealth of information about flu and preventing flu. Their website, listed below, contains posters and fact sheets that you can use to spread the word about preventing flu. For information about where to get a flu shot, you can contact your Primary Care Physician or your local Department of Health regional office. Many pharmacies give flu shots for a small cost usually between \$20 and \$30, but find out first if your health insurance will cover it.

Resources

<http://www.flu.gov>

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season-2012-2013.htm#vaccines>