



Health News from the DCF Medical Team

Seasonal Flu Facts

What is Seasonal Flu?

Seasonal Flu is caused by the influenza virus. It is NOT Swine Flu (H1N1). It is easily spread from person to person by coughing or sneezing. Seasonal Flu is prevalent from October thru May and peaks in January and February.

What are the symptoms of Seasonal Flu?

Fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, headache, chills and fatigue and possibly vomiting and diarrhea. These symptoms can range from very mild to very severe.

What is the treatment for Seasonal Flu?

Bed rest, plenty of fluids and non-aspirin pain relievers help most people feel better. Children and teens with the Seasonal Flu should never take aspirin, because of a rare but serious disease called Reye's syndrome that can occur in young people who take aspirin when they have the Seasonal Flu. Prescription drugs, called antiviral agents, can be used to prevent or treat the Seasonal Flu. A medical provider will determine whether a person needs these drugs.

Who is most at risk from Seasonal Flu?

Those most at risk of complications from the Seasonal Flu include children; women who will be pregnant during the flu season; anyone with chronic health problems such as diabetes, asthma or other lung diseases, kidney disease, heart disease or cystic fibrosis; persons receiving chemotherapy drugs; persons with weakened immune systems; and residents in crowded conditions such as dormitories, correctional facilities, nursing homes or residential facilities.

Who should be vaccinated against Seasonal Flu?

All children from 6 months thru 18 years, anyone 50 years of age or older; women who will be pregnant during the Flu season, persons with chronic health conditions and those who want to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza or spreading influenza to others. The vaccine gives protection from the common Seasonal Flu strains and can make an illness from a different flu virus milder.

When should vaccinations be obtained?

Vaccinations should be obtained in October or November. The vaccine can be given at the same time as other vaccines. Children younger than 9 years of age who are getting the vaccine for the first time should get 2 doses at least 4 weeks apart to be protected. Serious or allergic reactions to the Seasonal Flu vaccine are rare. Persons allergic to eggs, components of the vaccine, or persons that have Guillain-Barre Syndrome should not get the vaccine. If a child has allergies, check with the child's medical provider before giving the vaccine. Those who have a mild illness with no fever can usually get the vaccine. It takes up to 14 days for the protection to develop after the vaccination and protection lasts for up to one year.

What are some ways to protect against getting the Seasonal Flu?

Adults with the Seasonal Flu can spread it from about one day before symptoms appear to about one week after. Children can spread the Seasonal Flu even longer after they get sick. In general, people with Seasonal Flu are most able to spread it while they have a fever. Taking these steps is important:

1. Sneeze or cough into your sleeve or cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze;
2. Wash your hands with warm water and soap or alcohol based gels. Use a regular household cleaner to clean things that are touched often, like door knobs, toys, phones and faucets;
3. Avoid close contact with those who are ill. Try to stay at least 3-6 feet from someone who is sick with the flu;
4. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth;
5. Take antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them; and
6. Stay home from work and school if you get sick with a flu-like illness and avoid contact with others so the virus does not spread. Stay at home until you have no fever for at least 24 hours after the last dose of fever-reducing medication. For most people this means staying at home for about 4 days.

How do I find a Seasonal Flu clinic?

Check with MassPRO at flu.masspro.org; call your local Board of Health; check with your doctor or call a pharmacy for a list of their clinic times.

Where can I find information about the Swine Flu (H1N1)?

Visit the following website for current information on the Swine flu- www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu or call the Department of Public Health information line 1-866-627-7968 or the Local Board of Health.

References: www.cdc.gov/flu; and www.mass.gov/dph/swineflu

