

Flu Facts



Pre-reading

Questions:

- What do you know about the flu? What questions do you have about it?

Definitions:

- Respiratory – having to do with breathing, or the organs involved in breathing
- Vaccine – a solution administered to a person to build up resistance against a disease
- Antibody – a substance produced in the blood that can make the body resist certain illnesses

Reading

The flu is a **contagious** respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Every year in the United States, on average: 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu; more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications; and about 36,000 people die from the flu.

Symptoms of the flu include: fever, runny or stuffy nose, headache, muscle aches, extreme tiredness, dry cough, and sore throat. Stomach symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea can also occur, but are more common in children than in adults.

Some people, such as the elderly, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications. Complications of the flu can include pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children may get sinus problems and ear infections.

Flu viruses are spread in droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. They usually spread from person to person, though sometimes people become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five days after becoming sick. That means that you can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

The best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each fall. October or November is the best time to get vaccinated. However, getting vaccinated in December or even later can still be beneficial. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May.

There are two types of vaccines, the flu shot and the nasal spray vaccine. The flu shot is an inactivated vaccine, containing dead virus. It is given with a needle. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.

The nasal spray flu vaccine is one made with live weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu. This vaccine is approved for use in healthy people 5 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant. About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection.

Certain people should get vaccinated each year. They are either people who are at high risk of having serious flu complications or people who live with or care for those at high risk for serious complications. People who should get vaccinated each year are those who live in long-term care centers, adults and children with chronic heart and lung conditions, people with diabetes, and anyone with HIV/AIDS.

Others who should get the flu vaccine are adults over 65 years of age, children ages 6 to 23 months, and women who will be pregnant during the flu season. All health care workers should also be vaccinated. If you are wondering if you should get a flu shot, talk with your doctor.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Key Facts about Influenza and the Influenza Vaccine*

Level 7.5

Understanding

1. What are the two types of flu vaccines? How are they different? _____

2. What does the word **contagious** mean? _____

3. When should you get a flu vaccine? Why then? _____

4. What groups of people should get vaccinated each year? (List at least three.) _____

5. During what time frame can you pass the flu to others? _____

6. How can you protect yourself from the flu (besides getting the flu vaccine)? _____

7. What is a **symptom**? _____

8. How does the flu spread among people? _____

Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Write about your own experience with the flu. Have you had it before? Is so, how often and what were your symptoms? What flu vaccines, if any, have a received? Do you think they are worthwhile? Why or why not?
