

Flu Season and Seasonal Flu Vaccination

Are seasonal flu vaccines covered?

In accordance with your health plan, flu shots are covered under the preventive care benefit for eligible covered individuals.

Get a flu shot from your doctor or at a participating retail pharmacy. Flu shots administered by a network doctor, or at an affiliated care clinic or pharmacy will be paid in accordance with your plan. Depending on your benefit plan, you may have a copay or coinsurance.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine that I get protect me against the 2009 H1N1 flu?

No. The seasonal flu vaccine is unlikely to provide protection against 2009 H1N1 flu.

Who should get a seasonal flu shot?

In general, anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting the flu should get vaccinated. Also, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) strongly recommends that certain 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, receive the flu shot. The following groups are considered high risk and are urged to get a seasonal flu shot:

- People 50 years of age and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, asthma, heart disease, cancer, etc.)
- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:
 - Health care workers
 - Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
 - Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than six months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)
- Children age six months up to their 19th birthday
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities

I had a flu shot last year, so can I skip getting the vaccine this year?

Each year, the flu strain is different, so past immunity is no guarantee of protection. The flu shot is a safe and effective way of reducing your chances of getting flu and is recommended every year in the fall. Contrary to a long-standing myth, you cannot get the flu from the shot.

I've never had the flu, so why should I consider the vaccine this year?

Anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting seasonal flu should consider getting the flu shot. If you fall into any of the categories under the high-risk groups, the CDC strongly recommends you get a flu shot. Discuss your concerns with your doctor or other health care professionals to determine the best course of action for you.

Will the nasal-spray flu vaccine protect me as well as getting a flu shot?

It's important to be aware that vaccination with the nasal-spray flu vaccine is an option for healthy* people two to 49 years of age who are not pregnant and healthy persons who live with or care for those in a high-risk group. The one exception is healthy persons who care for persons with severely weakened immune systems who require a protected environment; these healthy persons should get the inactivated vaccine.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of flu include fever (greater than 100°F or 37.8°C), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea can also occur, but are more common in children than adults. Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes.

*Healthy indicates persons who do not have an underlying medical condition that predisposes them to influenza complications.

How does the flu spread?

Flu viruses are thought to spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may 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 may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.**

I'm recovering from the flu. How quickly should I return to work? (CDC advice as of 8/7/09)

The CDC recommends that people with influenza-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100°F or 37.8°C), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.

This is a change from the previous recommendation that ill persons stay home for seven days after illness onset or until 24 hours after the resolution of symptoms, whichever was longer. The new CDC recommendation applies to camps, schools, businesses, mass gatherings and other community settings where the majority of people are not at increased risk for influenza complications. This guidance does not apply to health care settings where the exclusion period should be continued for seven days from symptom onset or until the resolution of symptoms, whichever is longer. For updates about the health care setting, log in to http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidelines_infection_control.htm.

How long does flu season last?

The timing and duration of flu seasons vary. While flu outbreaks can happen as early as October, most often influenza activity peaks in January or later. During the past 26 flu seasons, months with the heaviest flu activity (peak months) occurred in November for one season, in December for four seasons, in January for five seasons, in February for 12 seasons, and in March for four seasons.

PREVENTION

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash after use.
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also very effective, but should not replace washing your hands (if soap and water is available).
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Stay hydrated. This is the best way to avoid a compromised immune system.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- The CDC recommends that individuals who are sick from influenza should stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?

Limit contact with other people as much as possible. Do not go to work or school if ill, and report your symptoms to your doctor. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Discard used tissues in the waste basket. Cover coughs or sneezes with your hand if you don't have a tissue, but be sure to wash your hands after each cough or sneeze.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing hands often will help protect against germs. Wash with soap and water and/or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner – even if there is no visible debris or gross contamination on hands. The CDC recommends that hands be washed with soap and warm water for AT LEAST 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used.

Can I use an alcohol-based hand cleaner (hand sanitizer) instead of washing my hands?

According to the Mayo Clinic, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, which don't require water, are an excellent alternative to hand washing, particularly when soap and water aren't available. Commercially prepared hand sanitizers contain ingredients that help prevent skin dryness. Using these products can result in less skin dryness and irritation than hand washing.

It's important to note, however, that not all hand sanitizers are created equal. The CDC recommends choosing products that contain at least 60 percent alcohol.

To use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply about 1/2 teaspoon of the product to the palm of your hand.
- Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of your hands, until they're dry.

If your hands are visibly dirty, however, wash with soap and water, if available, rather than using a sanitizer.

RESOURCES FOR SEASONAL FLU

Where can I get more information on the seasonal flu and the 2009 H1N1 flu?

Further information is available at:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>
- World Health Organization (WHO): <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>
- US Government Pandemic Preparedness: www.pandemicflu.gov
- International SOS Preparedness Protocols (ISOS): <http://www.internationalsos.com/pandemicpreparedness/>

THIS PUBLICATION IS FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. IT IS NOT MEDICAL OR TREATMENT ADVICE.

We reference CIGNA and Great-West Healthcare to accommodate all covered individuals. CIGNA covered individuals, please disregard Great-West Healthcare references.

"CIGNA" and the "Tree of Life" logo are registered service marks of CIGNA Intellectual Property, Inc., licensed for use by CIGNA Corporation and its operating subsidiaries. All products and services are provided exclusively by such operating subsidiaries and not by CIGNA Corporation. Such operating subsidiaries include Connecticut General Life Insurance Company (CGLIC), CIGNA Behavioral Health, Inc., Intracorp, and HMO or service company subsidiaries of CIGNA Health Corporation and CIGNA Dental Health, Inc. In California, HMO plans are offered by CIGNA HealthCare of California and Great-West Healthcare of California, Inc. All other medical plans in California are insured or administered by CGLIC. CGLIC has acquired the business of Great-West Healthcare from Great-West Life & Annuity Insurance Company ("GWLA"). Certain products continue to be provided by GWLA (Life, Accident and Disability, and Excess Loss). GWLA is not licensed to do business in New York. In New York, these products are sold by GWLA's subsidiary, First Great-West Life & Annuity Insurance Company, White Plains, N.Y. Rights in all marks are reserved by their respective owners. © 2009 CIGNA.

