What is the Flu?

Influenza, also known as "the flu", is a viral infection of the respiratory system, which includes the nose, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs. This virus that causes the flu often spreads from person to person. The illness can be mild, like a bad cold, or it can be very serious. In fact, people can die from the flu. As many as one in five Americans will get the flu each year.

When does the influenza season occur?

Influenza typically occurs any time between October through early April. However, the peak season of occurrence is during January and February.

Who gets influenza?

Anyone can get influenza.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is primarily spread from person to person through the air. Virus particles are released into the air through coughing and sneezing of persons who are infected with the influenza virus. Crowded conditions in enclosed spaces provide ideal conditions for the spread of influenza.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

The symptoms of influenza are primarily fever, headache, sore throat, body aches, and a severe and often prolonged cough. Intestinal symptoms, such as cramps and diarrhea, are uncommon. What is often called "intestinal flu" is not influenza. Influenza symptoms in children are very similar to those symptoms caused by other respiratory viruses. Although most individuals are ill for only a few days to a week, some individuals may develop sever complications, such as pneumonia, and may need to be hospitalized. Thousands of individuals die each year in the United States from influenza or influenza-related complications.

How soon do the symptoms of influenza occur?

Symptoms may start 1 to 3 days after coming into contact with an individual who is ill with influenza.

How is influenza diagnosed?

Usually a doctor will diagnose a case of influenza based on the typical symptoms of fever, headache, sore throat, body aches, and cough.

What is the treatment for influenza?

Rest and liquids are usually adequate.

When, and for how long, is an infected person able to spread influenza?

The "contagious" period varies, but it probably begins the day before symptoms appear and extends for about one week after the first symptoms appeared.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Because influenza is spread from person to person through the air, individuals who have an influenza-like illness should remain home until they have recovered from their illness.

How can influenza be prevented?

Annual immunizations against influenza are the most important control measure.

There are **other things you can do to stay well** and not spread the flu virus. As an example:

- Stay away from people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- Stay home from work, school and errands if you are sick. You will help keep others from getting sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue, if one is handy. Throw it away immediately after use. Otherwise, use your upper sleeve.
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly.
- Don’t touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- And, avoid using sharing personal items (such as lip balm, toothbrushes, sodas, etc.)

What is the influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine is a killed virus vaccine containing three strains of influenza virus, two of Influenza A, and one of Influenza B. The strain components are changed annually based upon worldwide surveillance of circulating influenza strains.

When should I get the influenza vaccine?

As soon as the vaccine is available. It is best to get vaccinated early! It takes about 2 weeks for the vaccine to stimulate immunity, so getting the vaccine is the best method of obtaining protection.

Are there any side effects to the influenza vaccine?

Most individuals will experience no side effects from the injected influenza vaccine. Less than one-third of those who receive the vaccine will have some soreness at the vaccination site if they receive the injectable vaccine, and about 5% to 10% will experience a headache or a mild fever. The most serious side effect that can occur after an influenza vaccination is an allergic reaction in individuals who have a severe allergy to eggs. For that reason, people who have an allergy to eggs should not receive the influenza vaccine.

Who should get the influenza vaccine?

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in coordination with the Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP), has issued recommendations for influenza vaccinations. High-risk groups who are recommended priority for vaccination with the flu shot include:

- all persons, including school-aged children, who want to reduce the risk of becoming ill with influenza or of transmitting influenza to others;
- all children aged 6–59 months (i.e., 6 months–4 years);
- all persons aged >50 years;
- children and adolescents (aged 6 months–18 years) receiving long-term aspirin therapy who therefore might be at risk for experiencing Reye syndrome after influenza virus infection;
- women who will be pregnant during the influenza season;
- adults and children who have chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, hematological or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus);
- adults and children who have any condition (e.g., cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders) that can compromise respiratory function or the handling of respiratory secretions or that can increase the risk for aspiration;
- health-care personnel;
- healthy household contacts (including children) and caregivers of children aged <5 years and adults aged >50 years, with particular emphasis on vaccinating contacts of children aged <6 months; and
- healthy household contacts (including children) and caregivers of persons with medical conditions that put them at higher risk for severe complications from influenza.

<u>USFK priorities for influenza immunizations are</u>:

- Medical personnel who perform direct patient care.

- Active duty service members, emergency-essential civilians, and equivalent DoD civilian employees; and DoD contractor personnel carrying out mission-essential services.

- Personnel at higher risk for severe complications from influenza (i.e., children from 6 months up to 5 years of age; persons aged 50 years of age or older; women who will be pregnant during flu season; persons with chronic diseases, and weakened immune system).

- All other USFK personnel, to include retirees; family members; DODDS and Child/Youth Services staff; and USFK employees and contract personnel who want to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza.

Does past infection with influenza make a person immune?

Generally no. Because the influenza virus can change its surface markers to elude the body's immune system, individuals who have had an influenza illness or the influenza vaccine in a previous year may still become infected with a new strain. Because of this, the influenza vaccine is given each year.

Are there any alternatives to getting a shot for preventing influenza?

A new type of influenza vaccine is now available and is sprayed into the nostrils rather than injected into the muscle. This is called an intranasal influenza vaccine. The vaccine, called FluMist, was licensed in 2003 and is an attenuated (weakened) live vaccine.

Who can get FluMist?

The live attenuated intranasal vaccine (FluMist®): will be administered to eligible healthy personnel 5-49 years of age.

Who should not get FluMist?

The following people should not get intranasal influenza vaccine. Anyone in these groups should contact their health care provider about getting inactivated influenza vaccine.

- Adults 50 years of age or older.
- Children younger than 5.
- People with long-term health problems such as:
    - Heart disease
    - Lung disease
    - Asthma
    - Kidney disease
    - Metabolic disease such as diabetes

    - Anemia and other blood disorders
- People with a weakened immune system due to:
    - HIV/AIDS or another disease that affects the immune system
    - Long-term care with drugs that weaken the immune system such as steroids
    - Cancer treatment with X-rays or drugs
- Children or adolescents on long-term aspirin treatment (these people could develop Reye syndrome if they catch influenza).
- Pregnant women.
- Anyone with a history of Guillain-Barre Syndrome.
- Anyone with a history of hypersensitivity to Flumist or eggs.

The following people should talk with a physician **before** obtaining *either* flu vaccine:

- Anyone who has ever had a serious allergic reaction to eggs or to a previous dose of influenza vaccine.
- If you have a fever or are severely ill at the time the vaccination is scheduled, you should probably wait until you recover before getting influenza vaccine.

What are the risks from live, intranasal influenza vaccine?

A vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of a vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small.

Live, intranasal influenza vaccine can cause mild symptoms:

-Mild problems:

Some children and adolescents 5-17 years of age reported mild reactions during clinical studies, including:

- Runny nose or nasal congestion
- Fever
- Headaches and muscle aches
- Abdominal pain or occasional vomiting

These problems usually occurred after the first dose and went away on their own.

Some adults 18-49 years of age reported:

- Runny nose or nasal congestion
- Cough, chills, tiredness/weakness
- Sore throat
- Headache

During clinical studies with live, intranasal influenza vaccine, many of these symptoms occurred whether or not the person was vaccinated. Even when they occurred after vaccination, they may not have been caused by the vaccine.

-Severe problems:

- Life-threatening allergic reactions are very rare. If they do occur, it would be within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.
- No life-threatening reactions were reported during clinical trials of live, intranasal influenza vaccine.

What if there is a moderate or severe reaction?

What should I look for?

- Any unusual condition, such as a high fever or behavior changes. Signs of a serious allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heartbeat or dizziness.