



Pandemic Influenza Preparedness

The words Pandemic Influenza can cause even the most cautious among us to wash our hands a second time and attempt to remember if we've bothered to get a flu shot recently. Every year between 5% and 20% of Americans get the flu and an astounding 70 million days of work are missed as a result. The indirect cost to missing work because of illness is between \$3 and \$12 billion a year, delivering a giant blow to business and industries all over the U.S. Families in Pennsylvania have been receiving flu shots to protect themselves against the effects of the flu, and this continues to be one of the best defenses from influenza.



When we come down with a sudden illness, the majority of the time we are inclined to blame it on the flu. And this would not be an incorrect assumption for the most part. Influenza is medically described as an acute, epidemic disease occurring in numerous forms, with symptoms ranging from a cough and runny nose, to fever, chills and vomiting. Since the strains are constantly changing, the antibodies you've received in the past will not necessarily protect you from new influenza subtypes. So what do we need to do to protect ourselves from this seasons new and improved strain of influenza and who will it target next?

Who's at Risk?

The following are some of the factors that may increase your risk of catching the flu and which may increase the complications associated with any pandemic influenza;



- ◆ **Age** - The young and the elderly are at a higher risk of contracting the seasonal flu.
- ◆ **Living conditions** - Those who reside in facilities that house higher numbers of residents such as nursing homes, military barracks, day cares and schools are more exposed to the flu than those who live alone or in single family homes.
- ◆ **Weakened immune systems, Obesity and pregnancy**– Those who are pregnant and people who are taking anti-rejection drugs, cancer treatments, corticosteroids as well as those who have HIV/AIDS all have weakened immune systems and leave the person more vulnerable to catching the flu and developing complications.
- ◆ **Obesity and Chronic illness** - Those who have heart problems, asthma, diabetes or other chronic conditions are placed at a higher risk for complications from influenza as well as those with a BMI of 40 or more.



Prevent it!



Most seasonal flu activity occurs between October and May, most commonly peaking around December and February. But it's never too late to get a flu shot. This is recommended by the CDC as the #1 best way to protect yourself from the flu for everyone six months and older. These following ways are also advised in order to stay healthy this flu season;

- ✓ **Get vaccinated!** - This is the best way to prevent the flu in the first place, and if you do catch the flu after getting vaccinated, your symptoms are less severe and considerably shortened in duration.
- ✓ **Stay away from sick people** - The flu is spread through the air in droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or even talks. Keeping your distance from someone who is exhibiting the symptoms of the flu is a good way to avoid getting sick.
- ✓ **Wash you hands** - The droplets which are shared by an infected individual can be picked up on your hands and spread to you through your eyes, nose or mouth, so keeping hand sanitizer readily available is a good practice during the flu season.

If you do get sick...

At the first signs of illness, go home. People who come down with the flu are likely contagious with the virus a day or two before symptoms begin until about five to ten days after they first appear.

If you become ill with the flu, and you are a high risk patient, then getting treated with antiviral drugs is highly recommended. If the flu is treated soon enough, this is the best way to reduce the severity and length of it. But for those who are not suffering from a weakened immune system, or other condition which places them at high risk, the best treatment for the flu is *rest* and *fluids*.

Be prepared to be holed up for a few days and try to limit your public interaction. Have a few cans of soup and plenty of drinking water or your favorite hydration solution on hand to get you through.

Have a healthy season!



Additional Resources

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency: <http://www.pema.pa.gov>

ReadyPA: www.readypa.org

Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/>

Federal Emergency Management Agency: www.ready.gov

American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org/prepare>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/>

