

# HEALTHFUL WORKPLACE

Be Prepared: Flu Season is Coming...Again



***Seasonal influenza (flu) is a contagious, potentially life-threatening respiratory illness. Flu season typically begins in the fall, peaks during the winter and tapers off in the spring.***

Flu prevention will be especially important during the 2021-22 season because it is expected to coincide with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and related outbreaks.

A combination flu-COVID vaccine is not available for the 2021-22 season. However, COVID and flu vaccine can be safely administered on the same day. If side-effects are a concern, waiting 14 days between vaccinations is recommended by WorkCare physicians.

## Flu Vaccination

Public health officials recommend annual vaccination for children starting at 6 months old and all adults, including pregnant women, unless they have a condition that precludes safe administration. Vaccination helps prevent the spread of illness to family members, co-workers and vulnerable populations such as the elderly, infants and people with certain health conditions who have a higher risk of serious complications such as pneumonia.

The more people who get vaccinated, the greater the protection afforded. This is referred to as herd or group immunity. Vaccines promote the development of antibodies that protect against infection beginning about two weeks after vaccination.

A quadrivalent vaccine has been approved for the 2020-21 season, meaning it fights four prevalent influenza strains. Flu vaccines available in the U.S. include inactivated, live attenuated and recombinant. Most flu vaccines are produced using an egg-based process, but recombinant vaccine is made without eggs.

The vaccine does not cause the flu. Some people experience discomfort from the shot and/or relatively mild, short-lived symptoms such as fatigue, muscle aches, headache, low fever or gastrointestinal upset. With vaccination, it's still possible to get sick after being exposed to a flu virus, but symptoms are likely to be milder.

A life-threatening allergic reaction to the vaccine, such as difficulty breathing, is rare. People with an egg allergy, those who have had a previous reaction to a flu shot, or who have had Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a

paralyzing illness, are advised to get medical advice before getting vaccinated.

## Other Prevention Measures

A combination of deterrents is needed because:

- People can be contagious before they experience symptoms.
- Some viruses can survive on surfaces for up to eight hours.
- People with suppressed immune systems are more vulnerable to illness.

Workplace infectious disease management may include using personal protective equipment such as gloves, gowns, masks, eye protection, total face shield and safe injection practices. Surgical masks or respirators may be used to help reduce the spread of disease via airborne or droplet contamination.

Additional prevention methods include:

- Frequent handwashing with soap and water (minimum of 20 seconds)
- Using alcohol-based hand sanitizer when water is not available
- Covering one's mouth when coughing or sneezing and throwing soiled tissues away
- Disinfecting surfaces such as countertops, phones and door handles
- Avoiding close contact and practicing social distancing
- Staying home when sick and until feeling better (without fever-reducing medication)
- Promoting a healthy immune system with exercise, good nutrition and quality sleep

## Symptoms

Some symptoms of influenza, the common cold and COVID-19 are similar. It may be necessary to get tested to confirm the nature of an illness. Common influenza symptoms include:

- Headache
- Runny nose
- Fever or feverish/chills (Not everyone with flu will have a fever)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches

Potential complications include:

- Pneumonia
- Ear infection
- Bronchitis
- Asthma attacks
- Sinus infection
- Dehydration

## Treatment

Non-prescription and home remedies for flu-like symptoms include:

- Over-the-counter medications to relieve fever, congestion and muscle aches
- Staying warm and getting plenty of rest
- Drinking clear fluids such as water or broth
- Using a washcloth to cool the skin
- Gargling a 1:1 mixture of salt and water for sore throat

Antiviral drugs may be prescribed to help shorten the course of illness and reduce the risk of serious complications. They are most effective when started within the first two days of experiencing symptoms. Antibiotics are not effective against flu viruses and should not be used. Misuse and overuse of antibiotics are linked to the development of potentially fatal medication-resistant infections. It's advisable to check with your doctor about remedies.