



Influenza Backgrounder

Influenza is not the common cold. It's serious. Influenza results in an average of 36,000 deaths and approximately 226,000 hospitalizations in the US each year.¹ Combined with pneumonia, influenza is the 8th leading cause of death in the nation.²

Influenza spreads easily from person-to-person, primarily when an infected individual coughs or sneezes. The disease can be transmitted even before influenza symptoms appear and for many days after the symptoms begin. Typical influenza symptoms include abrupt onset of high fever, muscle and joint pain, chills, a dry cough, headache, runny nose, and a sore throat.¹

Influenza viruses are divided into three types, influenza A, B, and C. Influenza types A and B are responsible for epidemics of respiratory illness that occur almost every winter and are often associated with increased rates of hospitalization and death. Influenza C is rarely reported.¹

Protection through Vaccination

The best way to reduce the effects of influenza is through annual vaccination. Influenza vaccines are safe and effective. Although mild side effects are possible, a person cannot get influenza from the vaccine. Health experts recommend annual influenza immunization for nearly 250 million people in the US.^{1,3} That's more than 4 out of 5 people in the United States.^{1,3,4} Despite this recommendation, influenza immunization rates fall far short every year.

Annual immunization is the best way to protect against influenza and its complications. It is safe and effective. Vaccination typically begins in October and can continue through March. In most seasons, influenza virus activity peaks in February or March, so vaccination throughout the entire influenza season is beneficial and recommended.¹

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends annual influenza vaccination for:¹

- Anyone who wants to prevent influenza
- Children 6 months-18 years of age
- Persons 50 years of age and older

- Persons with high-risk conditions, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes or heart disease
- Residents of long-term care facilities and nursing homes
- Women who will be pregnant during influenza season
- Health-care workers who come in contact with patients
- Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of anyone in a high-risk group, including children less than 6 months of age who are too young to be vaccinated themselves

Individuals with severe hypersensitivity to eggs or those who have had a previous vaccine-associated allergic reaction should avoid immunization.¹

Faces of Influenza

Faces of Influenza is an educational campaign from the American Lung Association, made possible through a collaboration with sanofi pasteur. This important initiative is designed to put a "face" on influenza in the US and to show Americans firsthand the seriousness of this potentially deadly infectious disease. The program is intended to help people see themselves, their loved ones, and others among the many "faces" of influenza.

References:

1. CDC. Prevention and control of influenza: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), 2008. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr57e717.pdf>. Accessed August 1, 2008.
2. CDC. Table 7: Deaths and death rates for the 10 leading causes of death in specified age groups, 2005. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/preliminarydeaths05_tables.pdf#B. Accessed April 28, 2008.
3. CDC. CDC's advisory committee recommends influenza vaccination for children 6 months through 18 years of age [press release]. <http://www.cdc.gov/media/pressrel/2008/r080227.htm>. Accessed April 1, 2008.
4. US Census Bureau. US POPClock Projection. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/popclockus.html>. Accessed April 22, 2008.