Here Comes the Flu Season…
What you need to know to protect your family

What is influenza (flu)?

According to the Minnesota Department of Health, influenza is a contagious respiratory disease that can be prevented by immunization. It is not the “stomach flu”. It is caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Stomach symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, can commonly occur in children.

How is the flu different from a common cold?

A child with a cold may complain of a stuffy nose or headache but will most likely continue on with normal activities. A child with the flu complains of body aches and often feels too sick to play.

Complications of the flu:

These include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

How flu spreads:

Flu viruses are spread in respiratory droplets caused by coughing or sneezing. It is usually spread from person to person but someone can be infected by touching an item with flu viruses on it and then touching their nose or mouth. Influenza can be spread one day before symptoms develop and five days after becoming sick.

Preventing the Flu: Get Vaccinated

The best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination every fall. There are two vaccines:

The flu shot: inactivated vaccine given with a needle; is approved for people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.

The nasal-spray flu vaccine: made with live, weakened flu viruses; approved for use in healthy people from 5 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

When to Get Vaccinated

October and November are the best times to get vaccinated. Getting the vaccine in December or later can still be beneficial because the flu season can last as late as May.

Who Should Not Be Vaccinated

- People with severe allergy to chicken eggs
- People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past
- People who developed Guillain-Barre syndrome within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously
- Children less than 6 months of age
- People who have a moderate to severe illness with a fever should wait to get vaccinated until the symptoms lessen.

What you can do to protect your family:

- Stay at home from school or work if you have a respiratory infection
- Avoid exposing yourself to others when you are sick with a flu-like illness.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue whenever you cough or sneeze. Make sure to throw the tissue away.
- If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not your hands.
- Wash your hands often!!
- Do not share anything that goes into the mouth.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces.
- Do not smoke around children.
What if you think you or your child has the flu?

- Stay at home
- Rest and drink lots of fluids to help your body recover.
- Antibiotics will not help treat the flu. Influenza is a virus, not a bacteria.
- Call your doctor or clinic if you are concerned.

To locate a local flu shot clinic in your area call:

Dakota County Immunization Info Line:
(952) 891-7999

Scott County Flu Shot Clinic
(952) 496-8555

MN Dept. of Health Flu Hotline:
(612)627-3950

For more information on this topic go to:

The Minnesota Department of Health
www.mdhflu.com

The Center For Disease Control
www.cdc.gov/flu