

### HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST WINTER FLUES

by

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Influenza is a viral respiratory tract illness that runs its own course and affects millions of people of different ages during peak seasons. Influenza is caused by two viruses A and B and infection is transmitted by sneezing and coughing. The symptoms of influenza are of sudden onset, fever, cough, sneezing and generalized muscle aches.

Persons at high risk for influenza related complications are:

1. Persons over 65 years of age.
2. Residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities.
3. Adults and children with chronic disorders of pulmonary and cardiovascular system including children with asthma.
4. Adults and children with chronic metabolic diseases like diabetes, cancer, renal dysfunctions and immunosuppressive illnesses.

Persons that can transmit influenza to high risk patients are:

1. Persons clinically infected with influenza virus and live with highly susceptible individuals.
2. Physicians, nurses and other health personnel.
3. Employees of nursing homes and chronic care facilities.

Influenza vaccine is made from highly purified egg grown viruses that have been inactivated and are non-infectious. Each year's influenza vaccine contains three virus strains two types A and one type B. The composition of vaccine rarely causes systemic or febrile reactions. The side reactions to vaccine are:

1. Swelling redness at the site of injection lasting for 1 to 2 days.
2. Fever, myalgia and other systemic symptoms that begin 6 to 12 hours after vaccination and can persist for one to two days.
3. Immediate hypersensitivity reactions such as hives, angioedema, allergic asthma that might result from hypersensitivity reaction to vaccine components - especially due to residual egg proteins.

Persons who should be vaccinated are:

1. Physicians, nurses and other personnel in both hospital and outpatient care settings.
2. Employees of nursing homes and chronic care facilities.

3. Home care providers to persons at high risk (visiting nurses, volunteer workers).
4. Household members including children of persons in high risk group.

Persons who should not be vaccinated are:

1. Persons known to have anaphylactic hypersensitivity to eggs or other components. An antiviral agent like amantadine or rimantadine should be used in those patients.
2. Anybody with acute febrile illnesses should not be vaccinated until their symptoms subsided.

Pregnant women who are high risk for getting influenza should be vaccinated as the vaccine is safe during pregnancy.

In the United States there have been several influenza outbreaks throughout the year, however the peak incidence is between December and early March. The optimal time for organized vaccination in high risk individuals is usually the period between Mid-October and Mid-November. The basic treatment of flu syndromes are:

1. Drink plenty of fluids.
2. Rest.
3. Take Tylenol, aspirin or nonsteroidal antiinflammatory agents like Motrin to reduce muscle aches and discomfort.
4. Do not give aspirin to children since it has been linked to high risk of getting Reyes Syndrome which is a potentially fatal illness.

5. For cough, use a cough syrup with dextromethorphan. Avoid taking Codeine containing cough syrup or a combination of over the counter medications since they may cause you more harm than good.
6. For stuffy nose, use nasal spray containing oxymetazoline, however nasal decongestant should not be used for more than 3 to 4 days

## Winter Flu Protection

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since stopping the medication might cause a withdrawal reaction. 7. If your symptoms persist for more than 4 to 5 days then get medical help, since complications of influenza are more serious problems.