

SHOO THE FLU

Influenza (flu) is a respiratory virus that comes on suddenly and can knock you off your feet for upwards of two weeks. The flu can quickly sweep through our schools and workplaces, so it's important to know how the germs spread in order to take special precautions to keep you and your family healthy.

How the Flu is Spread

- When a person infected with the flu coughs or sneezes, virus-ridden droplets enter the air and can be breathed in by anyone, exposing them to the flu.
- Hands contaminated with the virus can pass flu along just by shaking someone's hand, or touching doorknobs, telephones, shopping carts... After touching the contaminated object, a non-infected person then touches their nose, eyes or mouth, thus being exposed to the virus.
- Kissing someone who is infected or sharing their drink or utensils can also transmit it.

So what can you do to avoid getting influenza?

How to Avoid the Flu

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says **the first and most important way to avoid getting the flu is to get vaccinated** against it. Because the virus is continually changing, you must get vaccinated each year to be protected. This is especially important for people who are at High Risk for serious flu complications, including: young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart or lung disease, and people 65 and older.

The CDC also recommends these *Good Health Habits*:

Wash your hands often with soap and water. This will protect you from germs. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

Stay home when you are sick. If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Be sure to throw the tissue away after it is used and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, use your shirt sleeve.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. The virus is often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

Consider carrying alcohol-based wipes for those times when hand washing isn't practical, like when you touch a rental car steering wheel, a public telephone or to wipe down a restaurant highchair. Many grocery and discount retail stores now offer complimentary sanitizer wipes to clean the handles of shopping carts. And, parents of young children should wash toys that often find their way into little ones mouths.

Remember, people with the flu can be contagious from one day before showing any signs or symptoms of being ill. Be sure to share these *Good Health Habits* with your entire family. Children may need to be reminded of them a couple of times before they become habit, but following them is the best way to avoid a bout with the flu.