



A message from Mrs. Ellen Wolf, Naperville School District 203 Head School Nurse

INFLUENZA (the flu)

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious disease that is caused by the influenza virus. It attacks the respiratory tract in humans (nose, throat, and lungs). It usually comes on suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Body aches

Most people who get influenza will recover in one to two weeks. People age 65 years and older, people of any age with chronic medical conditions, and very young children are more likely to get complications from influenza. Pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus and ear infections are four examples of possible complications from the flu. The flu can make chronic health problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu, and people with chronic congestive heart failure may have worsening of this condition that is triggered by the virus.

The flu is spread, or transmitted, when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and sends flu virus into the air, and other people inhale the virus. The virus enters the nose, throat, or lungs of a person and begins to multiply, causing symptoms. Influenza may, less often, be spread when a person touches a surface that has flu viruses on it – a door handle, for instance – and then touches his or her nose or mouth.

A person can spread the flu starting one day before he or she feels sick. Adults can continue to pass the flu virus to others for three to seven days after symptoms start. Children can pass the virus for longer than seven days. Symptoms start one to four days after the virus enters the body.

Treatment for the flu includes the following:

- Rest
- Drink plenty of liquids
- Avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- Take medication to relieve the symptoms after consulting a physician

Please remember: never give aspirin to children or teenagers or young adults who have flu-like symptoms – and particularly fever – without first speaking to your doctor. Giving aspirin to children, teenagers and young adults who have influenza can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome.

Because it is caused by a virus, antibiotics (like penicillin) don't work to cure the flu. The best way to prevent the flu is to get an influenza vaccine (flu shot) each fall, before flu season.

A yearly flu shot is **recommended** for the following groups of people:

- persons aged > 50 years;
- residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities that house persons of any age who have long-term illnesses;
- adults and children > 6 months of age who have chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma;
- adults and children > 6 months of age who need regular medical care or had to be in a hospital because of metabolic diseases (like diabetes), chronic kidney disease, or weakened immune system (including immune system problems caused by medicine or by infection with human immunodeficiency virus [HIV/AIDS]);
- people who will be more than 3 months pregnant during the flu season.
- health care workers and household members of people in the high risk groups
- students living in institutional setting like dormitories should also be encouraged to get immunized

The following groups **should not** get a flu shot before talking with their doctor:

- People who have a severe allergy to hens' eggs
- People who have had a severe reaction to a flu shot in the past
- People who previously developed Guillain Barré syndrome in the 6 weeks after getting a flu shot

It is not possible to accurately predict in advance what type of flu season we are going to have. However, current surveillance data show that people in the United States are getting sick with flu earlier in the year than usual. Also, in laboratory tests from across the country, a greater proportion of specimens testing positive for influenza are type

A (H3N2). Historically, A (H3N2) viruses have been associated with more-severe flu seasons during which higher numbers of influenza-related hospitalizations and deaths have occurred. Although the A (H3N2) strain in this year's flu vaccine is somewhat different from the main circulating strain causing illness in the United States so far, laboratory studies indicate that the vaccine should still provide some cross-protection against the circulating A (H3N2) strain. It is not too late to get a flu shot this year. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for the protection from the shot to begin.

Please remember if your child is ill with a fever, they should not return to school until they have been fever free without medication for at least 24 hours. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) can offer more information about the flu. They can be reached at 1-800-232-2522.