



# FLU? | NOT ON MY WATCH.\*

## Patient's and Parent's Guide to Influenza Prevention

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### What Is Influenza?

Influenza, commonly called "Flu," is a serious, highly contagious, viral respiratory infection. Globally, even in a non-epidemic year, millions of men, women and children, especially the very young and old, contract the flu and hundreds of thousands die from this seasonal disease. Hospitalized patients and those with chronic illnesses such as asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease are especially susceptible to infection.<sup>1</sup> Each year in the United States, on average:

- more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications<sup>2</sup>
- 20,000 of those hospitalized are children younger than 5 years old<sup>2</sup>
- 36,000 people die from the flu<sup>2</sup>

Flu symptoms include fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches<sup>1</sup>. Influenza is primarily transmitted from person to person via large virus-laden droplets that are generated when infected persons cough or sneeze. Transmission may also occur through direct contact or indirect contact with respiratory secretions, such as touching surfaces contaminated with influenza virus and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. Adults may be able to spread influenza to others from 1 day before getting symptoms to approximately 5 days after symptoms start. Young children and persons with weakened immune systems may be infectious for 10 or more days after onset of symptoms.<sup>3</sup>

#### Take action to protect yourself and your loved ones from the flu.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urges you to take the following 3 steps to protect yourself and others from influenza:

#### 1. Take time to get a flu vaccine each year.

- The CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease.

#### People who should get vaccinated each year are:

- Children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday
- Pregnant women
- People 50 years of age and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term facilities
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu:
  - Healthcare workers
  - Household contacts of persons at high risk from complications from the flu
  - Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age

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### 2. Take everyday preventive actions.

- Follow the Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette Measures discussed in this brochure.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get the flu, the CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

### 3. See your healthcare provider if you have been exposed to the flu or have the flu.

- Your doctor may recommend flu antiviral drugs. They are not a substitute for vaccination.
- Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body, and which may prevent flu complications.<sup>2</sup>

### Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette Measures

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Dispose of the used tissue in the nearest waste receptacle.
- Clean hands with soap and water, an alcohol-based hand rub, or antiseptic handwash after touching respiratory secretions or handling contaminated objects.
- If you are sick and entering a healthcare setting, inform the staff and ask for a mask if you are coughing.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. Influenza. Fact sheet no. 211, March 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC says "take 3" steps to fight the flu. CS 08-121686. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flu/gallery/index.htm> Accessed: December 11, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Infection Control Measures for Preventing and Controlling Influenza Transmission in Long-Term Care Facilities. November 15, 2007. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/longtermcare.htm> Accessed: 12/04/2009.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette in Healthcare Settings. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm> Accessed: 12/04/2009.

### Resources

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.** Infection Control Measures for Preventing and Controlling Influenza Transmission in Long-Term Care Facilities. November 15, 2007. [www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/longtermcare.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/longtermcare.htm) Accessed: 12/04/2009.

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.** Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette in Healthcare Settings. [www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm) Accessed: 12/04/2009.