Q&A  What’s New With Flu?

What’s so different about the flu season this year?

- As we prepare for this year’s flu season, you will be glad to know that the flu vaccines have been updated to better match the current circulating influenza viruses. The viruses usually change every year, making it necessary to change the vaccine every year. This year the B/Victoria part of the vaccine was changed and the influenza A(H3N2) was updated. The flu vaccine now targets two influenza A viruses and two influenza B viruses.

- Another difference for the 2018-2019 season is that the nasal spray flu vaccine (live attenuated influenza vaccine or “LAIV”) is once again a recommended option for influenza vaccination for certain people. The nasal spray is now approved for use in individuals age 2 through 49, but not for pregnant women. There is also a precaution against using the nasal spray for people with certain underlying medical conditions, so ask your healthcare provider to help you decide which vaccine is best for you.

How bad can we expect this year’s flu season to be?

- It’s just not possible to predict with certainty the overall health impact such as infections, hospitalizations, and deaths from the flu virus, because it changes constantly and will vary from season to season. The CDC or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention collects, compiles, and analyzes information on influenza activity year-round in the United States. Locally, our staff at the Peoria City/County Health Department works with the medical community to publish a weekly flu surveillance report on our website as soon as we start seeing flu cases in our region. The report includes the current number of positive flu tests in our community and helps us inform people of the risks of flu in our area, the state, and the nation.
How effective will the flu vaccine be?
- The CDC, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, tracks influenza virus throughout the world to monitor disease activity and to predict the appropriate annual influenza vaccine.
- Some years the flu vaccine is more effective than others. That’s because the people developing the vaccines can’t predict exactly how the flu virus is going to change from year to year, and it takes months to make a new vaccine.
- Even in years when the vaccine is less effective, it still helps prevent some cases of the flu and also helps to prevent serious illness and outbreaks of the flu since antibodies made in response to one flu virus can sometimes provide protection against different but related flu viruses.

Who is recommended to get the flu vaccine this year?
- All people age 6 months or older should get the flu vaccine every year.
- The vaccine is especially important for certain people at high risk, such as pregnant women, people with chronic lung disease including asthma, chronic heart disease, and diabetes. These people are at increased risk because they may have more severe complications if they get the flu.

What about egg allergies?
- People sometimes worry about this. That’s because some forms of the flu vaccine contain small amounts of egg. But the amount is so small that it does not cause an allergic reaction. If you have an egg allergy, you should still get the flu vaccine.

Should I still get a flu vaccine if I had the vaccine last year?
- Yes, flu viruses “drift” meaning they change constantly. The virus can change from one season to the next or it can even change within the course of one flu season.
- Since the viruses have changed, the vaccine has changed to better match the circulating viruses. That’s why it is important to get vaccinated every year.

What kinds of vaccine are available – shot, nasal?
- Yes. The flu vaccine comes in different forms, including:
  - A shot that goes into muscle (usually in the upper part of the arm)
  - A nasal spray
- Your doctor can help you decide which vaccine is best for you.

Where can I get the flu vaccine?
- Flu vaccines are offered by many doctor’s offices, clinics, health departments, pharmacies, and college health centers, as well as by many employers, and even by some schools.

Can I get the flu from the vaccine?
No, people sometimes feel sick after getting the vaccine, but this is often because they were already starting to get sick with the flu or another virus before they had the vaccine.

How would I know if I have the flu or just a cold?

- The flu virus can cause a high fever (temperature higher than 100°F or 37.8°C), extreme tiredness, headache or body aches, cough, sore throat, and a runny nose.
- These symptoms will come on very suddenly.
- Symptoms that are not usually part of the flu in adults are gastrointestinal issues, such as vomiting and diarrhea. However, these symptoms may occur in a small number (10 to 20 percent) of influenza infections in children.

When should I seek medical attention, if I think I have the flu?

- If you think you have the flu, stay home, rest, and drink plenty of fluids. You can also take acetaminophen (sample brand name: Tylenol) to relieve fever and aches.
- Do not give aspirin or medicines that contain aspirin to children younger than 18. In children, aspirin can cause a serious problem called Reye syndrome.
- Most people with the flu get better on their own, within 1 to 2 weeks. But you should call your doctor or nurse if you:
  - Have trouble breathing or are short of breath
  - Feel pain or pressure in your chest or belly
  - Get suddenly dizzy
  - Feel confused
  - Have severe vomiting
- Take your child to the doctor if they:
  - Start breathing fast or have trouble breathing
  - Are not drinking enough fluids
  - Will not wake up or will not interact with you
  - Are so unhappy that they don’t want to be held
  - Have a fever with a rash
- If you decide to go to a walk-in clinic or a hospital because of the flu, tell someone right away why you are there. The staff might ask you to wear a mask or to wait someplace where you are less likely to spread your infection.
- Whether or not you see a doctor or nurse, you should stay home while you are sick with the flu and keep your child home if they are sick. Don’t return to work or school until your fever has been gone for at least 24 hours, without taking medicine such as acetaminophen.

How can I protect myself and others from the flu?

- Get your flu vaccination every year. It’s the most effective strategy for preventing influenza.
• You should also wash your hands often with soap and water, or use alcohol hand rubs.
• Remember to cover your cough with a tissue or your sleeve.
• And stay away from people who are sick or if you are sick.

Where can I get more information on the flu in our area?
• For important information on influenza in the community and other public health issues, visit the Peoria City/County Health Department website at www.pcchd.org.

###

The Peoria City/County Health Department continues efforts to improve community health in Peoria County with the overarching goal “to increase the number of people who are healthy at every stage of life.”