

Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About... **Influenza ('the flu')**

- **The flu is caused by a virus** that spreads from infected people to the nose or throat of others. Symptoms usually appear within two to four days of being infected. A person is considered contagious for another three to four days after symptoms disappear.
- **The U.S. "flu season"** generally runs from November to March/April every year.
- **Flu symptoms:**
 - Fever
 - Chills
 - Dry cough
 - Nasal congestion
 - Sore throat
 - Headache
 - Muscle aches
- **Why do you need a flu shot every year?** Because the flu virus changes, at least one of the vaccine's viruses must be replaced with a newer one every year. Plus the shot only lasts about a year.
- **When does a shot start working?** Protection develops one to two weeks after you get your flu shot and may last a year.
- **Who should not get a flu shot?** If you have a severe egg allergy (e.g., hives, asthma, swelling, breathing problems) and are at high risk for flu complications, ask your doctor about safe ways of getting a shot. If you are severely ill and have a fever, wait until you are well to get your shot. If you are mildly ill with or without fever (e.g., head cold), it's OK to get a shot.
- **How effective are flu shots?** The shot is almost 90% effective in preventing type A and type B influenza. If you manage to get the flu, it will be a milder case if you've gotten the shot.
- **Flu deaths:** Twice as many Americans die from the flu every year as die from AIDS, breast cancer, or prostate cancer.