

"STEP UP" TO PREVENT FLU



As fall and winter approach, flu season is upon us too. Influenza (flu) presents health challenges not only to us as individuals, but to our families, and our VA and hometown communities. Flu is a respiratory illness that spreads easily. It is caused by viruses that can change from year to year. Anyone can get the flu. This is why it is important for all of us to “step up” and help stop the spread of flu!

STEP 1 Get your flu shot

People who are 6 months and older should get the flu vaccine (flu shot or nasal spray). This year the vaccine will protect you from the “2009 H1N1 Pandemic Flu”, as well as two other strains of “regular” flu, so adults will need only one flu shot. Almost all people who get the flu shot have no serious problems from it. Remember, the best way to stop the flu is to get the vaccine each year.

STEP 2 Know how flu is spread

When a person with the flu sneezes, coughs, talks, or laughs, the flu virus can spread into the air as droplets from the mouth or nose. These droplets can spread to people and surfaces within 3 to 6 feet. The flu virus can

spread to your hands if you touch anything that has the virus on it. If you then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, you can get the flu. Remember, people may be able to spread the flu virus to others 1 day before they feel sick and up to 5 days after getting sick.

STEP 3 Know the symptoms of flu

Symptoms of flu include a fever (usually high), muscle aches and pains, headache, feeling tired and weak, chest discomfort, and coughing. People with flu may also have a stuffy nose and sore throat. Remember, illness can start 1 to 4 days after you get the flu virus.

**Each year in the U.S., flu causes more than
226,000 hospitalizations and about 36,000 deaths.**

STEP 4 Keep your hands AND surfaces around you clean

Clean hands often by washing with soap and water or by using alcohol-based hand rubs. Clean hands before eating or preparing food, before caring for someone who is sick, before touching your face, mouth or eyes. Clean your hands after using the bathroom, after caring for someone who is sick, and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. Keep surfaces clean that are touched often such as phones, light switches, countertops, door and cabinet knobs, keyboards and mouse, and TV remotes. Remember, the flu virus can live on surfaces for 24 to 48 hours.

STEP 5 Cover your coughs and sneezes

Use tissues to stop germ “droplets” that spread from coughs and sneezes. If tissues are not available, raise your arm and cover your face with your upper sleeve. Remember to dispose of tissues in waste baskets and to clean your hands afterwards.

STEP 6 Stay home when sick

Because flu spreads easily from person to person, stay home when you are sick. School and work are well-known places that people get the flu. Remember, treat the flu by getting plenty of rest, drinking fluids, and using medicines that reduce fevers.



You can reduce the spread of flu this year. Protect yourself, your family, and your hometown and VA community from the flu. For more information and resources, visit www.publichealth.va.gov/flu.

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www.publichealth.va.gov/InfectionDontPassItOn