

Influenza (Flu) Fact Sheet

Definition

- Influenza is a contagious illness caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. It can cause mild to severe symptoms, resulting in hospitalization or death.
- Influenza can be a very serious illness. It is not the common cold.
- The flu vaccine is the best tool available to prevent influenza because it helps build antibodies to protect specifically against flu. Hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received flu vaccines over the past 50 years and there has been extensive research supporting the safety of seasonal flu vaccines.

Statistics

- CDC estimates that influenza results in 9-45 million illnesses, 140,000-810,000 hospitalizations and 12,000-61,000 deaths every year.
- There is consistently lower flu vaccination among Black and Hispanic adults compared to White adults. In 2016-2017, 38.5% of Black adults and 37% of Hispanic adults age 19 and older got the seasonal flu vaccine, while 48.2% of White adults got the vaccine.
- Among adults with high-risk conditions, flu vaccination coverage is lower among Black (54.9% vaccinated) and Hispanic adults (52% vaccinated), compared to White adults (61.4% vaccinated).

Detection and Prevention

- Signs of the flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, feeling weak or more tired than usual, headache, chills, and body aches. Not everyone who is sick with flu have all the signs of the flu at the same time. Contact your health care provider if you are having severe flu symptoms or are at-risk of flu complications.
- Everyone aged 6 months and older is recommended to receive an annual flu shot. Speak with your health care team about whether a flu shot is right for you and what flu shot would be best.

Risk Factors

- Some individuals are more likely to get serious flu complications that can result in hospitalization and sometimes death. These high-risk groups include:
 - Adults 65 years and older
 - People with underlying medical conditions like lung disease, heart disease, neurologic disorders, weakened immune systems, and diabetes
 - Children younger than 5 years old, specifically those younger than 2 years
 - Pregnant women
- Other groups are more likely to be exposed to the flu. These groups include:
 - African Americans, Latinx and Native populations, who are disproportionately affected by chronic medical conditions that can increase the risk for serious flu and COVID-19
 - Caregivers and residents in long-term care facilities
 - Essential workers who have frequent interactions with each other and/or the public