

CONCERN[®] Services

We're More Than An EAP...

Our goal is to Help People Live Better & Help People Work Better. The following information from the **CONCERN WorkLife Services** program is intended to help you accomplish that goal and remind you that, as your Employee Assistance Program, we are here for you and your family. Visit us on-line at www.ak.concernservices.com or call (513) 891-1627 / (800) 841-5002 for no-charge, confidential assistance.

Flu Season: 2010-2011

When is the flu season in the United States?

In the United States, the peak of flu season has occurred anywhere from late November through March. The overall health impact (e.g., infections, hospitalizations, and deaths) of a flu season varies from year to year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) monitors circulating flu viruses and their related disease activity and provides influenza reports each week from October through May. The first weekly influenza surveillance report of the 2010-11 season will be available on October 15, 2010 at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/>.

How does CDC monitor the progress of the flu season?

The CDC uses seven surveillance components to determine when and where influenza activity is occurring, determine what types of influenza viruses are circulating, detect changes in the influenza viruses collected and analyzed, track patterns of influenza-related illness, and measure the impact of influenza in the United States. All influenza activity reporting by states, laboratories, and health-care providers is voluntary.

How does the flu spread?

The main way that influenza viruses are thought to spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes.

If I got the flu last year, will I have immunity against the flu this year?

In general, a person who is infected with an influenza virus one year will have some immunity to closely related viruses that may persist for one or more years. For example, if someone was infected with the 2009 H1N1 virus that predominated during the 2009-10 season, they are likely to have some immunity that will protect them if they are exposed to that strain or a closely related strain again during the 2010-11 season.

The degree of protection depends on the health of the person involved. Young and healthy people with normal immune systems will likely have good immunity against the same or closely related strains of virus from one year to the next. However, people with weakened immune systems are less likely to have immunity that carries over in other years. It's important to remember that influenza viruses are constantly changing so antibody made against one strain will become less effective against new strains as influenza strains evolve over time.

In addition, there are different types of influenza viruses circulating and different variants within virus types, and the same type of flu virus does not necessarily circulate each year. For instance, during the 2009-10 flu season, 2009 H1N1 viruses predominated; however, infection with this virus (and subsequent antibodies protecting against re-infection with the same virus) would not provide protection against influenza B or influenza A (H3N2) viruses.

Does the flu have complications?

Yes. Some of the complications caused by flu include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children may get sinus problems and ear infections as complications from the flu.

How do I find out if I have the flu?

It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from other viral or bacterial causes of respiratory illnesses on the basis of symptoms alone. If your doctor needs to know for sure whether you have the flu, there are tests available to diagnose it. The most common tests are called *rapid influenza diagnostic tests*. These tests can provide results in 30 minutes or less. Unfortunately, the ability of these tests to detect the flu can vary greatly. Therefore, you could still have the flu, even though your rapid test result is negative. In addition to rapid tests, there are several more accurate and sensitive flu tests available that must be performed in specialized laboratories, such as those found in hospitals or state public health laboratories. All of these tests require that a health care provider swipe the inside of your nose or the back of your throat with a swab and then send the swab for testing. These tests do not require a blood sample.

Do other respiratory viruses circulate during the flu season?

In addition to flu viruses, several other respiratory viruses also can circulate during the flu season and can cause symptoms and illness similar to those seen with flu infection. These non-flu viruses include *rhinovirus* (one cause of the "common cold") and *respiratory syncytial virus* (RSV), which is the most common cause of severe respiratory illness in young children as well as a leading cause of death from respiratory illness in those aged 65 years and older.

How soon will I get sick if I am exposed to the flu?

The time from when a person is exposed to flu virus to when symptoms begin is about 1-4 days, with an average of about 2 days.

How long is a person with flu virus contagious?

Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick. Children may pass the virus for longer than seven days. Symptoms start 1-4 days after the virus enters the body. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Some persons can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons may still spread the virus to others.

How many people get sick or die from the flu every year?

Flu seasons are unpredictable and can be severe. It is estimated that, on average, approximately 5% to 20% of U.S. residents get the flu, and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized for flu-related complications each year. Over a period of 30 years, between 1976 and 2006, estimates of flu-associated deaths range from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people.

Can the flu be treated?

Yes. There are influenza antiviral drugs that can be used to treat flu illness.

Is the "stomach flu" really the flu?

Many people use the term "stomach flu" to describe illnesses with nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. These symptoms can be caused by many different viruses, bacteria or even parasites. While vomiting, diarrhea, and being nauseous or "sick to your stomach" can sometimes be related to the flu—more commonly in children than adults—these problems are rarely the main symptoms of influenza. The flu is a respiratory disease and not a stomach or intestinal disease.