

Safety Note # 151

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES



Each year in the United States, on average, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 people die from seasonal influenza (flu) complications. You can help keep yourself, your family, and your co-workers healthy and prevent the spread of seasonal colds, flu, and other communicable diseases by practicing some simple measures at home and in the workplace. Over the past few years, novel influenza viruses have emerged, including H1N1 (also known as swine flu) and H5N1 (also known as avian influenza). The precautions to protect yourself and others from these novel influenza viruses are the same as those recommended for seasonal flu or other common communicable illnesses.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urges you to take the following actions to protect yourself and others from the flu:

Take time to get vaccinated for seasonal influenza

- CDC recommends a yearly seasonal flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against seasonal influenza. While there are many different flu viruses, the seasonal flu vaccine protects against the three seasonal viruses that research suggests will be most common.
- Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk of serious flu complications, including young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease, and people 65 years and older. Seasonal flu vaccine is also important for health care workers, and other people who live with or care for high risk people to prevent giving the flu to those at high risk.
- People who have ever had a severe allergic reaction to eggs may be advised not to get vaccinated. People who have had a mild reaction to egg—that is, one which only involved hives—may receive a flu shot with additional precautions. Make sure your health care provider knows about any allergic reactions.



Take everyday preventive actions

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your sleeve. An informative and amusing video on covering your sneeze can be viewed at: <http://www.coughsafe.com/>
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, try to avoid infecting others. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick. CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- Visit the CDC website (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>) to find out what to do if you get sick with the flu and how to care for someone at home who is sick with the flu.



Stay Informed

In addition to the precautions above, it is important that you stay informed, especially during the annual flu season. Health officials will provide additional information as it becomes available. UC ANR Risk & Safety Services has links on our website at http://safety.ucanr.edu/safety_notes that lead to up-to-date information from CDC and other agencies. When new diseases emerge, we will keep this site current with national, state, and local guidance about influenza or other communicable disease. Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds, and other social distancing measures.