



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Flu Vaccine is Ready

National Influenza Vaccination Week – December 2-8, 2012

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

The flu season is here and it's time to get immunized. The updated seasonal flu vaccine has been delivered to providers across the country and is ready to be administered.

Dr. Joe Bresee is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. He's joining us today to discuss the importance of getting vaccinated against the flu. Welcome to the show, Joe.

[Dr. Bresee] Thanks, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Joe, when, exactly, is the flu season?

[Dr. Bresee] Well, in the US, the flu season usually starts in the late fall and extends through the spring. And in most years, the peak of the season occurs during February or March. This season, we've already seen a lot of flu in the country, making it an especially early start to the flu season because we usually don't see this much flu in December. But while it's too early to tell how severe or how long the flu season will be at this point, if you haven't already received your 2012-13 flu vaccine, you should do it now to protect you and your family. It's not too late, even if your community has already had flu outbreaks.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the symptoms of the flu and how is it transmitted?

[Dr. Bresee] Most people get cough and runny nose and sometimes sore throat when they get infected with an influenza virus, and many will get fever, muscle aches, and headache. For most people, the illness will last for several days and may keep them from school or from work but they'll get better without any treatment. However, influenza can cause more serious illnesses, including pneumonia, or can worsen existing chronic diseases, like chronic lung or heart disease or diabetes. Remember that flu causes about 200,000 hospitalizations and thousands of deaths each year in the United States, so it can be very severe.

Influenza viruses are respiratory viruses and therefore, they're spread from an infected person to another person through close contact, especially through droplets spread by coughing or sneezing. They can also be spread by direct contact or even potentially through contact with contaminated surfaces. Because of this, while vaccination is the best single way to protect yourself and your family, simple things like frequent hand washing,

covering your cough when you're sick, and staying home when you're sick are useful ways to keep you from getting the flu or other respiratory infections and giving them to other people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are certain groups more susceptible to complications from the flu?

[Dr. Bresee] Yes. There are certain groups of people who are at increased risk of serious flu disease or complications. They include very young kids, especially kids under five years old, and older adults, especially people over 65. Pregnant women are at higher risk of hospitalization if they get the flu, and people with underlying chronic diseases, like heart disease, lung diseases, like asthma or COPD, diabetes, kidney disease, or any disease which suppress your immune system will also put you at high risk. Finally, people with neurologic or neurodevelopmental diseases, especially kids, are at higher risk of severe flu. For all these people, it's especially important to get vaccinated each year and to talk with your doctor about medications that can treat the flu if you get flu symptoms. It's also important for those of us who care for people with high risk conditions to get vaccinated ourselves to help prevent us from spreading the flu to them. Finally, it's important to know that anyone can get very ill from the flu and even be hospitalized, even if they don't have a high risk condition. That's why we recommend vaccine for everyone six months of age and older each year.

[Dr. Gaynes] Joe, can you get the flu from the vaccine?

[Dr. Bresee] No you can't. Current vaccines are very safe and can't give someone the flu, since they contain either killed viruses or, for the nasal vaccine, weakened forms of the virus. Some people will inevitably get flu-like symptoms during the few days after getting vaccinated. That's because either they get the flu infection shortly before getting vaccinated or during the two week period that it takes the body to gain protection after getting vaccinated. The other reason is that you can be infected with another respiratory virus that's not flu but which can look like flu and give you the same symptoms around the time you get vaccinated.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can people get the flu vaccine?

[Dr. Bresee] People have a lot of options of where they can get vaccinated each year, and also options of the types of flu vaccines they can actually get. While doctor's offices and health departments continue to be a wonderful place to get your vaccine, vaccines are also increasingly available from many pharmacies, workplaces, and other retail and clinic locations.

Also, there are a lot of options in the types of flu vaccines you can get. In addition to the traditional seasonal flu shot that's available for anybody six months of age and older, a nasal spray influenza vaccine is also available for non-pregnant, healthy people between two and 49 years of age. Elderly people over 65 can also get a high dose flu shot. And, finally, an intradermal flu shot, which uses a needle that's 90 percent smaller than the

regular flu shot is approved for adults 18 to 64 years of age. We hope that with all these choices. It'll be easy to protect yourself this and every flu season.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about the flu vaccine?

[Dr. Bresee] All of this information I talked about and a lot more is available on our flu website at cdc.gov/flu.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Joe. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Joe Bresee about the importance of getting vaccinated against the flu.

Persons at highest risk for severe complications from influenza include children under five, adults over 65, pregnant women, and people with chronic conditions, including asthma, heart disease, and diabetes, but we are all at risk for the flu. The influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone over the age of six months.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.