هـيـئـة الصـحـة بدبـي
DUBAI HEALTH AUTHORITY

Seasonal Influenza Awareness Guide

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Brief

This guide provides comprehensive information about seasonal influenza, the virus causing it, the importance of vaccination as an effective preventive measure against this disease, and also highlights the available services to assist you in preventing and treating influenza.

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General information about Seasonal Influenza

Seasonal influenza:

Seasonal influenza is a contagious acute respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses which circulate worldwide in certain seasons.

The causative organism:

Influenza viruses belong to the Orthomyxoviridae family. They are classified into types A, B, and C based on their core proteins.

Seasonal influenza incubation period:

The time from contracting the infection to illness which may range from 1 to 4 days.

General information about Seasonal Influenza

Transmission modes:

Seasonal influenza spreads easily in crowded areas such as schools and nursing homes, mainly by droplets. It can be transmitted:

1. **Directly** through (airborne droplets) dispersed through coughing, sneezing, and talking to an infected person.

2. **Indirectly** through touching contaminated hands or objects and then touching the eyes, nose, or mouth.

People who are at a high risk of getting influenza and its complications:

1. Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy.
2. Children between 6 months to 5 years.
3. Elderly individuals aged over 65 years.
4. Individuals with chronic medical conditions such as chronic heart, lung, kidney, liver, or blood diseases.
5. Healthcare workers.

General information about Seasonal Influenza

Facts about seasonal influenza:

- Seasonal influenza occurs all over the world, with an annual variable rate ranging from 5-10% in adults and 20-30% in children.

- Globally, annual influenza epidemics result in about 3 to 5 million cases of severe illness and about 290,000 to 650,000 respiratory deaths.

- Although patients will mostly recover without complications, it can be associated with serious illnesses, hospitalizations, and severe complications, especially in high-risk groups.

- It results in high levels of work/school absenteeism and productivity losses.

- Children aged 5-9 years typically have the highest rates of infection.

General information about Seasonal Influenza

Seasonal Influenza vaccine Facts:

- When children between the ages of 6 months and 8 years get the flu vaccine for the first time in their life, they need to get two doses four weeks apart. After that, they can be given one dose of the flu vaccine every year.

- Every flu season is different, and influenza can affect people differently.

- Influenza vaccines offer approximately 70-90% protection against clinical diseases in healthy adults.

- Flu vaccination has been shown in several studies to reduce severity of the illness.

- Flu Vaccine may reduce hospitalizations by 25-39% among older adults and has shown to reduce deaths by 39-75%.

Symptoms and complications of seasonal influenza

Signs and Symptoms of seasonal influenza

Seasonal influenza ranges from mild to severe and its' symptoms usually subside within a week without any medical intervention. However, it may cause severe illness requiring hospitalization and leading to serious complications particularly among certain high-risk groups.

Headache

Cough

Sudden onset of fever

Sore throat and a runny nose

Malaise

Muscle and joint ache

Young children may show vomiting and diarrhea

Symptoms and complications of seasonal influenza

Complications of seasonal influenza

Sinus infections

Ear infections

Severe pneumonia

Worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes

Differences between common Cold and Influenza

	Cold	Influenza
Type	Contagious respiratory illness	
Virus	Different viruses	Influenza viruses only
Symptoms onset	Mild to moderate and gradual	More intense and abrupt
Result	Not much health problems	Can cause serious complications

Cold and Influenza (Flu) have similar symptoms, it's hard to differentiate between them. Specific tests to differentiate between them and can tell about the type of flu a person has.

Diagnosis and treatment

Diagnosis of seasonal influenza:

- Usually diagnosis is done clinically. However, there are many respiratory viruses that can present as Influenza-like Illness e.g. rhinovirus, respiratory syncytial virus, parainfluenza and adenovirus.
- Collection of appropriate respiratory samples and a laboratory investigation will confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment of seasonal influenza:

- Patients that are not from the high-risk group should be managed with symptomatic treatment to relieve fever and pain and other symptoms and are advised, to stay home in order to minimize transmission to others.
- High-risk group patients might need different plan of treatment depending on the physician's evaluation.

Diagnosis and treatment

Seasonal influenza prevention

1

Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent the disease.

2

Regular hand washing and sanitizing.

3

Good respiratory hygiene –applying cough and sneezing etiquette.

4

Early self-isolation of those feeling unwell, feverish and having other symptoms of influenza.

5

Avoiding close contact with sick people.

6

Avoiding touching eyes, nose or mouth.

7

Clean and sterilize frequently used surfaces and tools.

General information about the seasonal influenza vaccine

The "flu shot" is an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is usually administered in the arm.

How do flu vaccines work?

Flu vaccines stimulate the production of antibodies in your body, providing protection against the influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season.

What is the appropriate age to receive the vaccine?

The vaccine is recommended for all individuals aged 6 months and older.

General information about the seasonal influenza vaccine

Safety of the influenza vaccine:

Flu vaccines have a good safety record and have been used by millions of people for over 60 years. Side effects are generally mild and go away on their own within a few days.

When is the best time to get vaccinated?

Ideally, the influenza vaccine should be administered annually in September or early winter, before the influenza season begins. However, if you missed that window, vaccination is still encouraged later as influenza may peak in the subsequent months specially for people travelling or going to Hajj and Umrah.

How long does it take for the vaccine to become effective after vaccination?

The vaccine becomes effective approximately two weeks after vaccination. It is best to get vaccinated before influenza viruses begin spreading in the community and with enough time before travel.

The effectiveness of seasonal influenza vaccine

Recommended groups to get the vaccine

The following groups are strongly encouraged to receive the influenza vaccine as they are at higher risk of contracting the disease and its complications:

1. Health care providers
2. Children 6 months to 5 years
3. Elderly aged 65 years and above.
4. Pregnant women in any stage of pregnancy
5. Pilgrims
6. Caregivers of patients with (chronic diseases and immunodeficiency diseases)
7. Individuals with chronic medical conditions, including:
    - Diabetes
    - Heart disease
    - Lungs diseases such as asthma
    - Chronic liver disease
    - Chronic kidney disease
    - Those immunodeficient due to certain illness or taking immunosuppressive drugs.

The effectiveness of seasonal influenza vaccine

Groups that should not take the vaccine

- **Children younger than 6 months old.**
- **People who have severe allergy to the vaccine or its components.**
- **Those experiencing moderate to severe illness symptoms, with or without fever. In these cases, it is important to postpone vaccination.**

The effectiveness of seasonal influenza vaccine

Benefits of the influenza vaccination include:

- Prevents you from getting sick with influenza.
- Reduction in the severity of illness for vaccinated individuals who still get sick
- Decreased risk of flu-related hospitalization
- Keeps you protected if you suffer from certain chronic health conditions.
- Protection for pregnant individuals, both during and after pregnancy, and safeguarding infants in their first few months of life.
- By getting vaccinated, you help protect your community and loved ones, especially at-risk groups.

The effectiveness of seasonal influenza vaccine

The effectiveness of the flu vaccine:

- Influenza vaccines offer approximately 70-90% protection against clinical disease.
- They help protect against the main types of flu viruses, although there is still a chance you might get the flu.
- However, if you do get it, it's likely to be milder and for a shorter duration.
- Having a flu vaccine can also help stop you from spreading the flu to other people who may be more at risk of serious problems from it.
- Among elderly people, vaccination may reduce the number of hospitalizations by 25-39% and it has also been shown to reduce overall mortality by 39-75%.
- It typically takes 10 to 14 days for the flu vaccine to become effective.

The effectiveness of seasonal influenza vaccine

Vaccines side affects

- **Redness, swelling at the site of injection**
- **Headache**
- **Fever**
- **Muscle aches**
- **Nausea**
- **Allergic reaction to a component of the vaccine**

These side effects are usually mild and short-lasting, especially when compared to symptoms of the flu.

Tips to reduce post vaccination discomfort

- Continue to move your arm as usual.
- Take a painkiller, such as paracetamol.

Frequently asked questions

Can I catch influenza after vaccination?

No, because the vaccination contains an inactive (non-contagious) virus. Some people may experience flu-like symptoms, such as a mild fever and muscle aches, after receiving the vaccination. These symptoms are considered minor side effects and are not indicative of influenza.

Why do we need to get the vaccine annually?

Flu viruses undergo frequent. As a result, the composition of the vaccine is reviewed annually at least, and vaccines are updated to protect against the viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming flu season. A person's immune protection from previous vaccinations may also decrease over time, making annual vaccination necessary.

Frequently asked questions

Can I get influenza even though I got influenza vaccine this year? And why?

Yes as:

- You may have been exposed to the virus shortly before getting vaccinated.
- You may be exposed during the time that your body takes to build up antibodies after vaccination.
- You may have been infected with the less common variant which the vaccine does not cover.