

# SEASONAL INFLUENZA (FLU)

## A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY & FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS & LEADERS

*The CDC flu vaccination recommendations are now simple & easy to remember:*

**EVERYONE EVERY YEAR!**

### INTRODUCTION

In the United States between 5% and 20% of the population gets the flu each flu season. Each year more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu-related complications. Severity of flu varies greatly from year to year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that flu-associated deaths in the U.S. ranged from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people during each flu season between 1976 and 2006. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is dedicated to reducing these numbers.

Vaccination is the best protection against getting the flu and from flu-related complications. CDC recommends that **every person 6 months and older receive an annual flu vaccine.**

In order to help keep communities healthy during flu season, we need the participation of people like you - leaders and members of community and faith-based organizations (CFBOs) who know their communities well. **Organizations like yours are uniquely positioned to help keep people healthy.** As trusted leaders, you are able to communicate important health information about the need for vaccination and healthy practices in an effective and motivating manner.

There are a number of people in the U.S. who are traditionally difficult to reach with health messages and interventions. As faith and community leaders, you know those who are most vulnerable and hard-to-reach in your community, and you know how to reach them. By partnering together, we ensure that all people have access to vaccine and health messages to protect themselves and their loved ones from the flu.

In addition to providing information about flu, this guide provides specific action steps you can take to help keep your community healthy by:

- **Educating yourself and your community about flu facts**
- **Communicating health information effectively**
- **Supporting vaccination efforts**

There is great variation among CFBOs, so different parts of this guide may be more relevant to your organization than others. Use this guide to inform those activities that work best in your setting.



## I. EDUCATING YOUR COMMUNITY OR CONGREGATION ABOUT FLU FACTS

As a trusted messenger, you and your organization can help to educate your community about the flu. Below are some key “flu facts” and some everyday steps that people can take to protect themselves from the flu.

### Symptoms of flu

Symptoms of the flu may include fever, coughing, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches, body aches, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults. It’s important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever. A fever is a temperature taken with a thermometer that is equal to or greater than 100.4°F (38°C).

### Everyday steps to protect your health

- 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 unavailable, cough or sneeze into your shoulder or elbow instead of your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you cough or sneeze. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you have flu-like symptoms, stay home for at least 24 hours after you are free of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications like acetaminophen, aspirin or ibuprofen. This step is to help stop the spread of the virus to others.

### Groups at high risk for medical complications from the flu

Anyone can get flu and can have serious problems from flu, though some groups are at higher risk for complications from seasonal flu, including:

- Pregnant women
- Children younger than 5
- People who are 65 years of age or older
- People who are morbidly obese
- People with certain chronic conditions, such as heart disease, asthma, diabetes and/or those with kidney, liver or nervous system disorders

One common complication associated with influenza in people 65 and older is bacterial pneumonia. There is a vaccine against bacterial pneumonia available for people 65 and older. **CDC recommends that people 65 and older be vaccinated against bacterial pneumonia.**

## II. COMMUNICATING HEALTH INFORMATION EFFECTIVELY

You and your organization can play a vital role in ensuring that accurate public health information is communicated effectively. When information is shared by trusted messengers, people are more likely to respond and change their behavior. We need your help to deliver these public health messages to hard-to-reach people.

Here are some strategies for sharing messages:

- **Spread the word** about what individuals, personally, can do to stay healthy during flu season.
- **Share the message that CDC recommends that every person 6 months and older receive an annual flu vaccine.**
- **Set a healthy example for your community.** If you are experiencing flu symptoms, please stay home for at least 24 hours after you are free of fever.
- **Provide timely and accurate information in a regular format to your community.** Consider a “flu facts” section of your newsletter or a Healthy Habits feature to convey health tips for preventing flu.
- **Check <http://www.flu.gov> for the most up-to-date information on current recommendations and information** and share what you learn with your faith community or organization.
- **Communicate with and create linkages to populations that are vulnerable or hard-to-reach,** including people who are homeless, shut-in, uninsured or underinsured, non-English-speaking, unconnected to mainstream media, or are migrant workers, immigrants, or refugees.

You are uniquely positioned to share information with community members in both culturally-appropriate and easy-to-understand ways. In order to work effectively with vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations in your community, we suggest the following:

- Translate documents and health materials into languages spoken by members of your community.
- Ensure that messages are simple and clear for low-literacy audiences.

### The Affordable Care Act & the Flu Vaccine

Because of the Affordable Care Act, some health plans are required to cover certain vaccinations **without cost-sharing** (this includes co-pays, co-insurance and deductibles). For plan years beginning before March 2011, the following individuals who are enrolled in new group or individual health plans will be eligible to receive the seasonal flu vaccine without cost-sharing when provided by an in-network provider:

- Children 6 months through 18 years
- Certain high-risk adults 19 through 49 years
- Adults 50 years and older

**Beginning with the first plan year that starts after March 2, 2011,** any individual 6 months or older who is enrolled in a new group or individual health plan will be eligible to receive the seasonal flu vaccine with no cost-sharing requirements **when provided by an in-network provider. Families can check with their employer or insurance company to see if these rules apply to their plan.**

### III. SUPPORTING VACCINATION EFFORTS EVERY YEAR

You and your community can support seasonal flu vaccination efforts by: encouraging annual vaccination; linking people to vaccine locations; offering your facilities for a community clinic.

#### Encourage community members to get vaccinated for flu

- Include reminders to get vaccinated in regular communications and gatherings.
- Provide community members with information on where and when they can get flu vaccinations. To get this information, check with your local health department and check: <http://www.flu.gov/>.
- Organize rides to vaccination clinics and/or set up vaccination appointments.
- Hold an information session on flu vaccination for people in your community. Ask a health professional in your community or organization to give a presentation.
- Follow up with community members to help ensure that they receive all necessary vaccinations and see their doctor for treatment.

#### Link people to flu vaccination locations

You can help your community members access vaccination locations.

- Encourage community members to see their health care provider to get the flu vaccine.
- There are also numerous other locations where vaccine is offered, like health departments, pharmacies, urgent care clinics, and some schools, college health centers, and business offices.
- The Flu Vaccine Finder, a useful online tool for finding vaccine in your area at locations open to the public, is available at: <http://www.flu.gov/>. Help members of your community get vaccinated by placing the flu vaccine finder widget on your website and in printed materials. You can access this widget here: <http://www.flu.gov/news/socialmedia/index.html#flulocator>.



#### Offer your building or facilities as vaccination sites or organize a flu vaccination site where vulnerable or hard-to-reach people in your community gather.

Work with your local health department to organize this effort.

- CDC has posted guidance on setting up community clinics, available at [http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/vax\\_clinic.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/vax_clinic.htm).

#### Key information about flu vaccine

- Two doses of the conventional flu vaccine are needed for children under the age of 9 who have never received a flu vaccine.
- There is a special flu vaccine for people aged 65 years and older because older people are at a higher risk for flu complications.
- The Affordable Care Act has made preventive services, including the flu vaccine, more accessible and affordable. *See box on previous page for more information.*

