What is influenza?

Influenza (the Flu) is a serious disease spread by coughs and sneezes. It is caused by influenza A or B viruses, mainly during the winter season, but can occur as late as May. Flu can cause mild to severe illness and sometimes can lead to death.

What can I do to prevent getting influenza?

The best way to prevent influenza is to get a flu shot. If you contract the flu after receiving the shot, the vaccine can reduce the severity of symptoms. Practicing good hygiene and habits like washing your hands frequently, drinking plenty of water, and getting adequate sleep also helps. It is **NOT** too late to get a flu shot, although it can take up to 2 weeks to work. Vaccination locations can be located through your healthcare provider or through [http://vaccine.healthmap.org](http://vaccine.healthmap.org). Vaccination locations identified for the uninsured or underinsured by Alameda County Public Health Department can be located through [http://www.acphd.org/clinics.aspx](http://www.acphd.org/clinics.aspx).

What’s the difference between the flu and a cold?

Flu symptoms come on suddenly and are usually more severe. Symptoms include **abrupt** fever, chills, and feeling very tired accompanied by sore throat, headache, muscle or body aches, or nasal congestion. Pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus and ear infections are examples of **complications from flu**. Cold symptoms are gradual and usually milder. Sneezing, stuffy nose and sore throat are common; chills and fever are not.

Who’s at risk?

While the flu usually is not life-threatening, **some people are at high risk** of developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick. This includes people over 65 years old; anyone with chronic conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, or obesity; pregnant women; and children under age 5 with increased risk in children younger than the age of 2. It is strongly urged for these high risk groups to get vaccinated, as well as caregivers of these high risk individuals, particularly children under the age of 6 months who are too young to receive the vaccine. Call your health care provider if you think you have the flu and are at high risk for complications.

What can I do to feel better if I’m experiencing mild or moderate symptoms?

If you’re feeling sick an **Emergency Room may not be the best option**! Self-care is important. Stay home from school/work and rest. Avoid close contact with others. Cover your cough or sneezes with your sleeve or disposable tissues. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Wash hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Drink plenty of water. Treat fever and coughs with medicine you can buy at the store. Contact your doctor for guidance if symptoms do not improve or if they worsen.

When should I contact 911 or proceed to an Emergency Room?

Children who are having trouble breathing, bluish skin, fever with a rash, and may be unwilling to drink fluids should have 911 activated on their behalf or be taken to an Emergency Room. Adults experiencing trouble breathing, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness, difficulty eating or drinking, or confusion should activate 911 or proceed to an Emergency Room.

For more information visit: [www.acphd.org/flu](http://www.acphd.org/flu)