

Grandparents Corner

November 2013 - Influenza

Flu seasons are unpredictable in a number of ways. Although epidemics of flu happen every year, the timing, severity, and length of the season varies from one year to another.

The timing of the flu is very unpredictable and can vary from season to season. Flu activity most commonly peaks in the U.S. in January and February; however, seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October and continue to occur as late as May.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone six months of age and older as the first and most important step for protection against this serious disease. While there are many different flu viruses, the flu vaccine is designed to protect against the three main flu strains that research indicates will cause the most illness during the flu season. Having the flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available each year is always a good idea, and the protection you receive from vaccination will last throughout the flu season.

In addition, you can take everyday preventive steps like staying away from sick people and washing your hands to reduce the spread of germs. If you are sick with the flu, stay home from work or school to prevent spreading influenza to others.

So, what is influenza (flu)? The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by having a flu vaccine each year.

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore Throat
- Runny or Stuffy Nose
- Muscle or Body Aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

You may be able to pass the flu on to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five to seven days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

Certain people are at greater risk for serious complications if they catch the flu. This includes older people, young children, pregnant women, and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease, and persons who live in facilities like nursing homes.)

Vaccination should begin soon after the flu vaccine is available, and ideally by October; however, being vaccinated even later can be protective, as long as the flu viruses are circulating. While seasonal influenza outbreaks can happen as early as October, most of the time influenza activity peaks in January or later. Since it takes two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body that protect against influenza virus infection, it is best that people are vaccinated in order to be protected before influenza begins spreading through their community. The important step is to have a flu vaccine every year!

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - www.cdc.gov

Diabetes is a serious disease. Following your diabetes treatment plan takes round-the-clock commitment, but your efforts are worthwhile. Careful diabetes care can reduce the risk of serious, even life-threatening complications. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. *The odds of developing diabetes, along with serious complications, increase with age. T F*
2. *Older adults seek emergency care for blood sugar crises twice as often as the general diabetes population. T F*
3. *Even when people with diabetes know the risks, they still have trouble controlling their blood sugar levels. T F*
4. *In people with Type 2 diabetes, either the body doesn't produce enough of the hormone insulin, or cells can't use it properly. T F*
5. *Smoking does not increase the risk of diabetes complications. T F*
6. *High blood sugar can weaken the immune system, which makes routine vaccines important. T F*
7. *Sudden bouts of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) can cause confusion, delayed reaction, visual disturbances, or loss of consciousness, which can make driving dangerous. T F*
8. *Alcohol can cause low blood sugar, so it should be used only in moderation and always with a meal. T F*
9. *Exercise has no effect on diabetes. T F*
10. *Diabetes does not raise the risk for eye disease and vision loss. T F*

KEY: 1. T 2. T 3. T 4. T 5. F 6. T 7. T 8. T 9. F 10. F