

Message from the Parish Nurses

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INFLUENZA (FLU)

Flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, can result in hospitalization or at times lead to death. People that are at risk of serious flu-like complications are: young children, people 65 years old and older, pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions. The best way to prevent getting the flu is by getting an influenza vaccine each year.

THE FLU SEASON

Seasonal influenza (flu) viruses are detected year-round in the United States, flu viruses are most common during the fall and winter. Flu activity peaks between December and February, although activity may last as late as May.

HOW FLU SPREADS

- **Person to person:** People with flu can spread it to others up to 6 feet away, mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby.
- **When flu spreads:** People with flu are most contagious in the first 3 to 4 days after their illness begins. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick. Children and some people with weakened immune systems may pass the virus for longer than 7 days.

FLU SYMPTOMS

Flu is different from a cold. As it usually comes on suddenly. People who are sick with the flu often have some or all of these symptoms.

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills (not everyone with flu will have a fever)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

TREATMENT

There are prescription medications your doctor or health care provider may prescribe for treating the flu called “antiviral drugs”. Antiviral drugs can be prescribed as pills, liquid, an inhaled powder, or an intravenous solution. Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics, which fight against bacterial infections. Most people with the flu have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET SICK

If you get sick with flu symptoms, in most cases, you should:

1. Take antiviral drugs, if prescribed by your doctor or health care provider.
2. Take everyday precautions to protect others while sick.
 - Limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting others.
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after each use.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Apply hand sanitizer to the palm of one hand and rub it all over both hands until they’re dry.
 - Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like flu.
3. Stay home until you are better.
If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for necessities. Your fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

PREVENTING SEASONAL FLU

CDC recommends annual influenza vaccination for everyone 6 months and older with any licensed, influenza vaccine that is appropriate for the recipient’s age and health status, with no preference expressed for any one vaccine over another.

By Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>

More information can be found at:

<https://www.fda.gov/vaccines-blood-biologics/lot-release/infenza-vaccine-2019-2020-season>

Visit: www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org for “People At High Risk From Flu” and “Emergency Warning Signs Of Flu Sickness In High Risk Adults, Infants, and Children”

PEOPLE AT HIGH RISK FROM FLU

Anyone can get sick with flu (even healthy people), and serious problems related to flu can happen at any age, but some people are at high risk of developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick. This includes:

- Adults 65 years old and older
- Pregnant women
- Children younger than 5 years, but especially those younger than 2 years old
- Children with neurologic conditions
- Asthma
- Heart Disease & Stroke
- Diabetes
- HIV/AIDS
- Cancer

If you or your child are in a high risk group and develop flu symptoms, it's best for you to contact your doctor or health care provider as soon as flu symptoms occur.

Remind them about your or your child's high risk status for flu. CDC recommends that people at high risk for complications should get antiviral treatment as early as possible, because benefit is greatest if treatment is started within 2 days after illness onset.

EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS OF FLU SICKNESS IN ADULTS, INFANTS AND CHILDREN

In children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluid
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child doesn't want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with rash

In addition to the signs above, get medical help right away for any infant who has any of these signs:

- Being unable to eat
- Has trouble breathing
- Has no tears when crying
- Significantly fewer wet diapers than normal

In adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough