



## **Influenza**

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

### **What is Influenza?**

Influenza, also known as "the flu", is a viral infection of the respiratory system, which includes the nose, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs.

### **When does Influenza occur?**

In New Jersey, the flu typically occurs any time between October and early April. However, the peak season of occurrence is during January and February.

### **How is flu spread?**

Flu is primarily spread from person to person through the air. Virus particles are released into the air through coughing and sneezing of people who are ill with the flu. Crowded conditions in tight spaces provide ideal conditions for the spread of flu.

### **What are the symptoms of flu?**

The symptoms of flu are primarily fever, headache, sore throat, body aches, and a severe and often prolonged cough. Intestinal symptoms, such as cramps and diarrhea, are uncommon. Influenza symptoms in children are very similar to those symptoms caused by other respiratory viruses.

### **How soon do the symptoms of flu occur?**

Symptoms usually start 1 to 3 days after coming into contact with an individual who is ill with flu.

### **How is flu diagnosed?**

Usually a doctor will diagnose a case of Influenza based on the typical symptoms of fever, headache, sore throat, body aches, and cough.

### **What is the treatment for flu?**

Rest and liquids are usually adequate. Antiviral drugs may be used to try to reduce the severity of symptoms of flu and are effective only if given early in the illness.

### **Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?**

Because Influenza is spread from person to person through the air, individuals who have an Influenza-like illness should remain home until they have recovered from their illness.

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### **How can the flu be prevented?**

A routine vaccine against flu is the most important control measure. The flu vaccine (flu shot) is available through your personal physician, and through a variety of other health care providers, including many local health departments, visiting nurse association, and senior citizen centers.

### **When should I get a flu shot?**

October and November are the best times to get the shot, but getting the vaccine up through March can also offer protection. It takes about 2 weeks for the vaccine to build up immunity in the body and provide protection so it is best to get vaccinated early.

### **Are there any alternatives to getting a shot to prevent flu?**

A new type of Influenza vaccine is now available and is sprayed into the nostrils rather than injected into the muscle. This is called an intranasal Influenza vaccine. The vaccine, called FluMist™, was licensed in 2003 and is an attenuated (weakened) live vaccine.

### **Where can I get more information on flu?**

New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services (NJDHSS)

<http://www.state.nj.us/health/flu/faq.shtml>

Centers for Disease & Control Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>