

# Be Red Cross Ready

## Flu Checklist

**Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory disease caused by different strains of viruses. In the United States, there is a flu season that begins every fall and ends every spring. The type of flu people get during this season is called seasonal flu. Flu viruses spread from person to person when people who are infected cough or sneeze.**

### Know the Difference

**Seasonal Flu**—A contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza (flu) viruses occurring every year. It affects an average of 5 percent to 20 percent of the U.S. population by causing mild to severe illness, and in some instances can lead to death. Adults may be able to infect others 1 day before getting symptoms and as long as 5 days after getting sick.

**Epidemic**—The rapid spread of a disease that affects some or many people in a community or region at the same time.

**Pandemic**—An outbreak of a disease that affects large numbers of people throughout the world and spreads rapidly.

**H1N1 (swine flu)**—H1N1, referred to as “swine flu” early on, is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. In the United States, this new virus was first detected in people in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person-to-person worldwide, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) signaled that a pandemic of H1N1 flu was underway.

*It is important to stay informed about changes to guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC Web site posts regular updates to public health recommendations regarding a number of public health threats, including H1N1 (swine flu).*

**H5N1 (avian flu)**—Commonly known as bird flu, this strain of influenza virus is naturally occurring in birds. Wild birds can carry the virus and may not get sick from it; however, domestic birds may become infected by the virus and often die from it.

### What should I do to avoid getting sick?



**Get your flu shot every year for the best chance of protection.**

- Always practice good health habits to maintain your body's resistance to infection.
  - Eat a balanced diet.
  - Drink plenty of fluids.
  - Exercise daily.
  - Manage stress.
  - Get enough rest and sleep.
- Take these common sense steps to stop the spread of germs:
  - Wash hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Avoid or minimize contact with people who are sick (a minimum three feet distancing is recommended).
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with tissues when you cough and sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
  - Stay away from others as much as possible when you are sick.
- Anyone with a fever or other symptoms of the flu should stay home from work or school until at least 24 hours after the fever has gone (without medications).
- Get a flu shot every year. Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to minimize illness and death. Two shots will be needed for the 2009 flu season - one for seasonal flu and one for H1N1 flu.

### Are you considered high risk for flu-related complications?

- The following groups of people are at an increased risk: people age 50 or older, pregnant women, people with chronic medical conditions, children age 6 months and older and people who live with or care for anyone at high risk.
- People at high risk should have their vaccinations updated every year and receive pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine if age 50 or older, as directed by their physician.

### Do I have the flu?



**The flu usually begins with the rapid-onset of a high fever and body aches. Be aware of other common flu symptoms:**

- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea (more common in children than in adults)
- *NOTE: Having all of these symptoms doesn't always mean that you have the flu. Many different illnesses have similar symptoms.*

### Diagnosing the flu:

- It may be difficult to tell if you are suffering from the flu or another illness.
- Your health care provider may be able to tell you if you have the flu.
- If you develop flu-like symptoms and are concerned about possible complications, consult your health care provider.

### Potential risks and serious complications of the flu:

- Bacterial pneumonia
- Dehydration
- Worsening of chronic medical conditions
- Ear infections
- Sinus problems

### What should I do when someone is sick?



- Designate one person as the caregiver.
- Keep everyone's personal items separate. All household members should avoid sharing pens, papers, clothes, towels, sheets, blankets, food or eating utensils unless cleaned between uses.
- Disinfect doorknobs, switches, handles, computers, telephones, toys and other surfaces that are commonly touched around the home or workplace.
- Wash everyone's dishes in the dishwasher or by hand using very hot water and soap.
- Wash everyone's clothes in a standard washing machine as you normally would. Use detergent and very hot water and wash your hands after handling dirty laundry.
- Wear disposable gloves when in contact with or cleaning up body fluids.

### Terminology defined

**Immunity** to a disease is defined by the presence of antibodies to that disease in a person's system. Most people have some resistance to infections, either after they recover from an illness or through vaccination. Seasonal flu viruses change over time and immunity to them cannot be acquired unless vaccination is administered.

**Quarantine** is the physical separation of healthy people who have been exposed to an infectious disease from those who have not been exposed.

**Isolation** is a state of separation between persons or groups to prevent the spread of disease.

**Social distancing** is a practice imposed to limit face-to-face interaction in order to prevent exposure and transmission of a disease.