

Correction  
**Health Alert**

Gregory Cherpes MD  
ODP Medical Director

## 2018-2019 Flu Season Alert

The Office of Developmental Programs is sending out this reminder to get immunized against the flu. The flu season begins in October and can last into May. As a reminder of the seriousness of the flu season, it was recently reported that “more than 80,000 Americans died of the flu in the winter of 2017-2018, the highest number in over a decade.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends several flu vaccine options for the 2018-19 flu season. This season, flu shots (inactive influenza vaccine or recombinant influenza vaccine) and the nasal spray (Live attenuated influenza vaccine) will be available. Your health care practitioner can recommend the appropriate vaccine.

### **What do I need to know for the 2018-2019 flu season?**

#### **Get immunized against the flu annually.**

The CDC recommends those who are aged 6 months and older get a flu shot each year. Flu shots are especially important for those at risk for complications and for their caregivers. People who are at higher risk for complications include:

- People who have certain medical conditions including asthma, diabetes, chronic lung disease, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine disorders, kidney disorders, metabolic disorders, and liver disorders
- **Corrected:** Pregnant women or women who will be pregnant during flu season



- People 65 years and older
- Children aged 6 months to 5 years
- People who have a weakened immune system
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- Persons who are extremely obese (Body Mass Index of 40 or more)
- American Indians/Alaska Natives
- People who live with or care for others who are at high risk of developing serious complications

### **Do I need a flu vaccine every year?**

Yes. A flu vaccine is needed every year because flu viruses are constantly changing. The flu vaccine is created each year to keep up with the flu viruses as they change. There are different types of vaccines available and your healthcare provider can recommend which is best. The flu vaccine takes about two weeks to provide protection from the flu; the CDC recommends getting the vaccine before flu season begins or by the end of October.

### **Is there treatment if I get sick with the flu?**

Yes. If you get sick, there are drugs that can treat flu illness. They are called antiviral drugs and they can make your illness milder and help you feel better faster. They also can prevent serious flu-related complications, such as pneumonia.

### **Can I do anything else to help prevent the flu?**


Yes. In addition to getting the flu vaccine, you can help prevent the spread of influenza. You can practice good personal hygiene: wash your hands frequently, cough or sneeze into your elbow and stay away from people if you or they are ill.

### **Do I have the flu or a cold?**

The flu and the common cold have similar symptoms. Symptoms such as fever, body aches, tiredness, and cough are more common and intense with the flu. If these symptoms are present, contact your health care practitioner to determine the best course of treatment.



# Is it a cold or flu?



Signs and Symptoms	Influenza	Cold
Symptom onset	Abrupt	Gradual
Fever	Usual	Rare
Aches	Usual	Slight
Chills	Fairly common	Uncommon
Fatigue, weakness	Usual	Sometimes
Sneezing	Sometimes	Common
Stuffy nose	Sometimes	Common
Sore throat	Sometimes	Common
Chest discomfort, cough	Common	Mild to moderate
Headache	Common	Rare

[Source of graphic: Centers for Disease Control | Cold Versus Flu](#)

The flu can lead to serious complications. Immediate medical care should be sought for the following symptoms

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- In children: Bluish skin, not drinking enough, not waking up or not interacting, irritability (not wanting to be held), fever with a rash or when flu symptoms improve, but then return with a fever and worsening cough.
- For a review of signs and symptoms which require immediate, 9-1-1 involvement, see [ODP Health Alert “Call 9-1-1 in a Medical Emergency.”](#)



Having the flu, can also increase your chances of getting pneumococcal pneumonia. A vaccine for this type of pneumonia is available. Discuss with your health care practitioner if you should receive the pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine.

**Where can I get more information about flu?**

The CDC has a wealth of information about flu and preventing flu. Their website, listed below, contains posters and fact sheets that you can use to spread the word about preventing flu. Likewise, the PA Department of Health's website on influenza is an excellent resource. For information about where to get a flu shot, you can contact your health care provider or your local Department of Health regional office. Many pharmacies give flu shots for a small cost but find out first if your health insurance will cover it. The websites below have a flu vaccine finder. Simply enter your zip code to find a flu vaccine location near you, and resources with additional information.

**Resources**

[PA Department of Health Influenza Page](#)

**US Department of Health and Human Services:**

[Website Page for Vaccine Finder](#)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**

[Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices](#)