

Audience: People w/ Underlying Health Conditions

CDC: 2011-2012 Flu Season

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Asthma, Diabetes, and Other Health Conditions Bring Greater Flu Risks
CDC Urges People with Chronic Health Conditions to Get a Flu Vaccine

If you are one of the millions of Americans with a long-term health condition like asthma, diabetes, stroke, heart or lung disease, this important information about the flu applies to you. When combined with your existing health condition, the flu increases your risk of becoming seriously sick, which could result in an unexpected and expensive trip to the hospital—or even death.

“We have known for years that the flu is a serious disease, especially for people with certain chronic health conditions,” says Dr. Anne Schuchat, Assistant Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service and CDC’s Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. Last season, nearly 90 percent of adults hospitalized from flu complications had a long-term health condition; as did about 50 percent of hospitalized children.

Health conditions that put people at greater risk of flu-related complications include asthma (even if controlled by medication), lung disease, endocrine disorders (like diabetes, both type 1 and type 2), and heart disease. Other conditions that confer greater risk of serious complications are neurologic conditions (like stroke and other conditions related to the nervous system, brain or spinal cord), blood disorders, kidney disorders, liver disorders or a weakened immune system.

The burden of flu on people with these conditions is demonstrated each flu season. During the 2010-2011 flu season, the most frequently-occurring underlying conditions of adults hospitalized with flu were cardiovascular disease, metabolic disorders such as diabetes, chronic lung disease and asthma. In a study of 1,400 children hospitalized with laboratory-confirmed influenza, almost half had an underlying condition, and nearly 1 in 5 had asthma or reactive airway disease.

Millions of Americans are impacted by long-term health conditions, although many people don’t know that they have one of these conditions. For example, diabetes impacts an estimated 25.8 million Americans, but 7 million people (27 percent of those who have the disease in the United States) don’t even know they have it. Heart disease affects an estimated 26.8 million Americans, and asthma affects 24.5 million Americans. Ask your doctor whether you have a health condition that makes you more vulnerable to the flu.

The message is clear: people with long-term health conditions should take action to protect themselves against the flu by getting a flu vaccine. Like last season, the 2011-2012 season’s vaccine will protect against 2009 H1N1 and two other flu viruses. Flu vaccines have been given for decades. They are safe, and cannot give you the flu.

Symptoms of flu include fever (though not everyone with flu will have a fever), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and sometimes diarrhea and vomiting.

Flu viruses are thought to spread mainly from person to person through the coughing, sneezing, or talking of someone with the flu. Flu viruses may also spread when people touch something with flu virus on it and then touch their mouth, eyes, or nose. Many other viruses spread these ways too.

For more information, visit <http://www.flu.gov>, <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).

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