

Flu is Here: Take Action to Protect Yourself



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Flu season came late this year, but it's here now! According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, flu activity increased steadily during the month of February and is widespread in most of the country right now.

CDC tracks flu activity each week from October through mid-May. By the beginning of March 2009, 49 states were reporting widespread or regional influenza activity. In addition, the number of people seeking medical care for influenza-like illness had been above the country's normal baseline for five consecutive weeks.

According to Dr. Anthony Fiore in CDC's Influenza Division, "In most seasons, flu activity will peak in February. This season, we didn't see significant flu activity begin in the United States *until* February. This could mean we will continue to see flu activity for some time in the United States."

So what actions should people take to protect themselves from the flu?

Dr. Fiore says that a flu vaccine now can still offer protection this season. "For people who haven't gotten a flu vaccine yet, getting vaccinated now can offer protection against late-circulating flu viruses. And the good

news is that this year's vaccine is an excellent match with the majority of circulating flu viruses out there."

If you get the flu, CDC recommends antiviral drugs for flu treatment. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that can make flu illness milder and make people feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. This could be especially important for people at high risk of serious flu complications, including people older than 65 years of age and people with asthma, diabetes or other chronic medical conditions.

Antiviral drugs work best if started within two days of getting sick and must be prescribed by a health care provider. This season, CDC issued guidance for health care professionals on the use of antiviral medications.

Common Flu Symptoms

The flu usually comes on suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults

For more information about seasonal flu activity during the 2008-2009 flu season, please visit CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/flu.