

FLU PREVENTION AND PRECAUTIONS

The 2012-2013 influenza season started early and the flu activity level in New York State is categorized as widespread. Influenza is a contagious illness that affects the nose, throat, lungs, and other parts of the body. Influenza usually starts suddenly. Flu or flu-like illness is defined as fever of 100°F or higher with a cough or sore throat. People may also experience fatigue, body aches, headache, chills, and runny or stuffy nose; and less frequently, diarrhea and vomiting may also occur.

Flu viruses can spread quickly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by those infected with the flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching a surface or object with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. During flu season, occurrence of acute respiratory illness in several people living together within a short timeframe should be considered due to influenza until proven otherwise, regardless of whether the affected residents had been vaccinated.

The flu can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Some of the people we support are at high risk of serious complications related to the flu, especially those with chronic medical conditions, those 65 years and older, and children younger than 5 years old. Regardless of risk level, all individuals should be protected from the flu by taking all precautions possible.

There are steps you can take to protect the individuals you support, yourself, and your family:

1. Get a flu vaccine as soon as possible.
 - The flu vaccine is still available, but may be harder to find now than earlier in the season. Contact more than one provider (pharmacy, doctor, health department.) to find an available vaccine, if needed. Vaccination is available through a flu shot or nasal spray.
2. Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs.
 - If someone we support gets sick with the flu or a flu-like illness, please refer to the *Management of Influenza in Facilities Operated and/or Certified by OPWDD 2012-2013*, available at www.opwdd.ny.gov/node/1682.
 - Employees who become ill with the flu or have flu-like symptoms should be encouraged to refrain from reporting to duty until fever-free for 24 hours.
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, not a hand. This will block the spread of droplets from your mouth or nose that could contain germs. Assist people we support to do the same.
 - Emphasize appropriate hand washing with soap and water.
 - Have alcohol-based hand rub available for use when soap and water are not handy.
3. Provide appropriate care when flu-symptoms are observed.
 - In certified sites, the RN should be contacted and provide guidance for care and monitoring.
 - Contact a physician/health care provider right away if a person develops flu symptoms.
 - Be sure to follow the health care provider's recommendations and take all medications as prescribed.
 - If any of the following signs are noted, prompt referral to an emergency department should occur: trouble breathing, severe pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, dizziness/faintness, severe persistent vomiting, confusion/change in mental status, not drinking enough liquids.

For more information, please visit the following websites: www.cdc.gov/features/fluactivity/ or www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/influenza/seasonal/.