

Location _____ Trainer _____ Date _____

THE FLU

Influenza, or the “flu”, is a contagious respiratory infection and is usually not a serious health threat for most people. However, for the elderly or those who have a chronic health problem, influenza can result in serious complications, such as pneumonia.

Symptoms of the flu usually develop suddenly, about three days after being exposed to the virus. They include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose, and soreness and aching in the back, arms and legs. Although these are similar to those caused by cold viruses, flu symptoms tend to be more severe and to last longer. Abdominal cramps, vomiting or diarrhea symptoms of what is commonly called stomach or intestinal flu do not accompany influenza.

The flu is highly contagious and, if it occurs in your family or community, there is no practical way to avoid exposure to the virus. Bed rest, a mild pain reliever and lots of fluids are the best treatment. (Caution: Unless advised by a physician, a child or teenager with a flu-like illness should not take aspirin. Its use in the presence of a flu infection is linked with an increased risk of Reye syndrome. Instead use another mild pain reliever that does not contain aspirin.) Antibiotics are not effective against flu viruses.

Flu vaccines, while not always effective in preventing the illness, do reduce the severity of the symptoms and protect against complications that could develop. The shots are strongly recommended for persons 65 years of age and older and those who suffer from such chronic health problems as heart disease, respiratory problems, renal disease, diabetes, anemia or any disease that weakens the body's immune system. Infants, children and young people up to 18 years of age who are receiving long-term treatment with aspirin should also get a flu shot. Persons allergic to eggs or who have a high fever, however, should avoid or postpone getting a flu shot.

Because influenza vaccine is only effective for one year and viruses vary from year to year, it is necessary to get a flu shot every year. In Texas, the flu season usually begins in November and lasts until around the middle of April. If you plan to get a flu shot do so early since it takes about two weeks to develop full immunity. However, even a shot in January may protect against a late winter outbreak.