How to Avoid the Flu

National Influenza Vaccination Week

SPRINGFIELD – To help stay healthy during the holidays and into next year, give the gift of health by getting a flu shot to not only protect you, but others as well. National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW), December 2-8, 2012, is a national observance established to highlight the importance of flu vaccinations and encourage more people to be vaccinated after the holiday season, into January, and beyond.

“Getting vaccinated is the single best way for you to protect not only yourself against flu, but your loved ones as well,” said Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck. “The flu season typically runs from October to May, with the peak around January. We recommend everyone six months and older get vaccinated. So get vaccinated today before all the holiday parties and family gatherings.”

Much of the U.S. population is at increased risk from serious flu complications, either because of their age or because they have a medical condition like asthma, diabetes, heart conditions or because they are pregnant. For example, more than 30 percent of people ages 50 through 64 years have one or more chronic medical conditions that put them at increased risk of serious
complications from flu, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Similarly, all children younger than 5 years (and especially children younger than 2 years), and all adults 65 years and older, are at increased risk of serious flu-related complications. But even healthy children and adults can get very sick from the flu.

One of the biggest myths about the flu is a person gets the flu from a flu shot. The influenza vaccine cannot give you the flu. Why? Because the flu shot contains killed viruses, and the nasal spray has weakened viruses that cannot cause illness. If you get flu-like symptoms soon after being vaccinated, it can mean you may have been exposed to the flu before getting vaccinated, or during the two-week period it takes the body to build up protection after vaccination. It might also mean you are sick with another illness that causes symptoms similar to the flu.

Flu-like symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, but it is not typically associated with respiratory flu. If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone (without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) You can also go to a doctor for antiviral drugs, which can make illness milder, shorten the time you are sick and may prevent serious complications.

Vaccination is important for health care workers and others who live with or care for high-risk people to keep from spreading flu to high risk people. For example, children younger than six months are at high risk of serious flu illness, but are too young to be vaccinated.
Flu shots and the nasal spray are available in many doctor’s offices, local health departments, health clinics, pharmacies and other health care providers. For additional information about flu vaccinations and availability in your area, contact your local health department.

Currently we are seeing local flu activity in Illinois.

To reduce the spread of flu, it is also important to practice the 3 C’s –

- **Clean** – properly wash your hands frequently
- **Cover** – cover your cough and sneeze
- **Contain** – contain your germs by staying home if you are sick

For more information, log onto [www.idph.state.il.us/flu/index.htm](http://www.idph.state.il.us/flu/index.htm).