



An Infection Control Module: Protecting Your Clients During Flu Season

Instructions for the Learner

What will you learn?

After finishing this inservice, you will be able to:

- Understand who is at risk for the influenza virus.
- Name at least five different symptoms that arise from the flu.
- List three ways to help protect your clients during flu season.
- Discuss the difference between a cold, the flu, and pneumonia.
- Discuss who should get an annual flu vaccine and why.

We hope you enjoy this Inservice, “Protecting Your Clients During Flu Season”! It’s been prepared especially for nursing assistants like you. You work very hard, and we appreciate the effort you make to complete these educational materials. It shows your desire to continue learning and growing in your profession.

If you are studying the inservice on your own, please do the following:

- Read through **all** the material. You may find it useful to have a highlighting marker nearby as you read. Highlight any information that is new to you or that you feel is especially important.
- If you have questions about anything you read, please ask _____.
- Take the quiz. Think about each statement and pick the best answer.
- Check with your supervisor for the right answers. You need **8 correct** to pass!
- Print your name, write in the date, and then sign your name.
- Keep the inservice information for yourself and turn in the quiz page to _____ no later than _____. Show your Inservice Club Membership Card to _____ so that it can be initialed.

THANK YOU!



An Infection Control Module: Protecting Your Clients During Flu Season

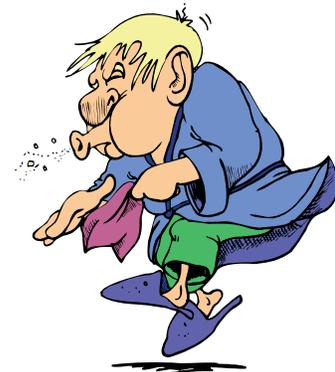


What's the Big Deal About the Flu?

Inside this issue:

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The flu (or "influenza") is a respiratory infection caused by a group of viruses. These tiny "bugs" cause a highly contagious illness, affecting *millions* of people all around the world every year. The flu can quickly spread from person to person, and generally causes outbreaks among people who share indoor spaces. It takes just one sneeze or cough to spread thousands of infected germs into the air, which are then free to infect other people!



The flu is responsible for employees calling in sick about 70 million times a year!

Influenza is a very serious illness. Not only is it extremely costly, but it remains a common cause of death all over the world. For many different groups of people, serious complications can follow the flu. There is no simple way of "curing" influenza permanently. The virus is always changing, and scientists are forced to search for a new strain of the vaccine every year.

There are many symptoms to watch for during flu season. Because they are very similar, the symptoms of a cold are often confused with the flu. In the

following pages, you will learn the difference between the common cold and the flu. You'll also learn about the relationship between the flu and pneumonia. This common illness affects many elderly people each year—maybe even some of your clients!

Throughout this inservice, you'll find many tips that may help you in your everyday work. You will also learn when, where, and how the flu virus breaks out. Keep in mind that the flu could affect you too! When flu season comes around, remember to keep an eye on your clients, and on yourself too!

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The History of the Flu



The flu is not a new phenomenon. Its damaging outbreaks have been happening for hundreds of years, and have killed millions of people.

- The most famous outbreak of influenza is the 1918 “Spanish Flu”. This epidemic, which started in Spain, killed more people than the first World War—an estimated 21 million! It also scared many scientists because the cause of the disease was completely unknown.
- The majority of deaths that occurred from the Spanish Flu were among young, healthy adults! Some of these deaths were due to the flu itself, and others stemmed from complications like pneumonia.
- In the 1930’s, more than a decade after the Spanish Flu epidemic, scientists finally discovered that the flu is caused by a *virus*.
- Even so, other epidemics have continued all over the world, including the Asian Flu of 1957, the Hong Kong Flu of 1968, and a recent outbreak in the United Kingdom that killed an estimated 26,000 people!
- The flu still remains unpredictable...in spite of screening technology that watches for outbreaks around the world. Unfortunately, widespread epidemics remain a serious possibility.
- The best way to prevent flu outbreaks is for people to receive the flu vaccine every year.

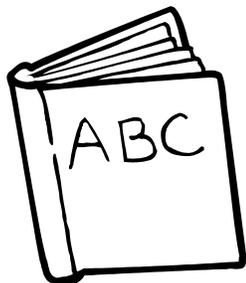


**Have you gotten
your annual flu
vaccine?**

The ABC’s of the Flu

There are three major types of the influenza virus:

- **Influenza A** is the most common type and spreads the most epidemics. The 1918 “Spanish Flu” was caused by this strain of the virus. Influenza A can also infect animals such as ducks, chickens, pigs, whales, horses, and seals.
- **Influenza B** also spreads epidemics, although, they tend to be more localized within a community rather than spreading across the globe.
- **Influenza C** is the most stable of the three strains. While A and B are always changing, Influenza C stays constant and is far less common. The symptoms produced by Influenza C are very mild.



Watch Out For These Symptoms...

With some illnesses, the symptoms appear gradually. With the flu, symptoms occur very quickly and intensely. Usually, the worst of these symptoms last from three to five days, although in high-risk clients they may last much longer. Here are the symptoms to watch out for in your clients (and yourself!):

- A fever, usually higher than 101 degrees F, but sometimes reaching as high as 106 degrees F!
- Body aches, generally in the head, back, and limbs.
- A persistent sore throat.
- Chills and/or severe sweats.
- Extreme feelings of weakness.
- A painful dry cough.
- A reduced appetite, or no appetite at all.



- Constant congestion or a runny nose.
- Nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea.
- Difficulty breathing.

Sometimes influenza worsens because of complications. These complications can be caused by medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, dehydration, and/or heart failure. A complication may have occurred if a client has:

- Shortness of breath.
- A fever above 101 degrees F for more than three or four days.
- An extreme earache.
- Persistent head and neck pain.
- A rash on the skin.



When and Where Does the Flu Strike?

- The flu virus can occur anywhere around the world. It doesn't matter if you live in a warm or cold climate. Even with new technology that monitors influenza cases around the world, epidemics are usually very sudden and unexpected.
- The most likely time for an epidemic to occur in the United States is between November and April. However, there have been many cases of the flu reported in October and the summer months.



In the Southern Hemisphere, flu season lasts from April through September.

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Tips For Controlling Infection During Flu Season

- **Colds** are spread through direct contact with germs. For example, if someone with a cold wipes his nose and then touches a doorknob, the next person to touch the doorknob is at risk for catching the cold. *This means you are more likely to catch a cold from a person by shaking their hand than from their airborne sneeze.*

- ◆ Be sure to wash your hands according to policy.
- ◆ Encourage or help your clients to wash their hands, too.

- The **flu** is spread through the air. For example, if someone with the flu sneezes or coughs without covering her face, the tiny germs are carried in the air to nearby people and objects.

- ◆ Hand washing is an important infection control measure.
- ◆ You should also encourage your clients to cover their noses and mouths with tissues when coughing or sneezing.



- Keep your clients dressed appropriately for the weather. If your clients become chilled while they are sick with a cold or the flu, it could lead to serious complications such as pneumonia.
- Avoid exposing your clients to people with colds or the flu. If you are caring for a client with the flu, be very careful to wash your hands and clean your equipment per policy before going on to the next client.

- The flu virus can live for a short time on objects like telephones, doorknobs, pens, pencils and handkerchiefs. Pay attention to your co-workers and to your clients. If you pick up a telephone right after someone else has coughed on it, you are putting yourself—and your clients—at risk!
- Encourage your clients to maintain a healthy food and fluid intake. People with good nutrition are more likely to fight off illnesses.
- Help your clients avoid stress. Studies have shown that stress increases the risk of infection and illness. Keeping your clients' stress level low means you are helping their bodies stay strong!
- If you observe any of the following changes in your clients, report it to your supervisor right away:
 - ◆ Shortness of breath
 - ◆ Chest pain with coughing
 - ◆ Fever
 - ◆ Sputum
 - ◆ Extreme fatigue
 - ◆ Muscle pain
 - ◆ Bluish lips
 - ◆ Severe headache



Remember to use gloves as outlined in the Standard Precautions Guidelines.

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Who Needs Protecting?

Although anyone can get the flu, some people have a much higher risk of getting influenza than others. Here are a few examples of people who are more likely to get the flu:

- Adults and children who have chronic diseases such as heart disease, asthma, cystic fibrosis, kidney disease, or diabetes.



- Anyone aged 50 years or older.
- Elderly clients who live in nursing homes or long term care facilities.
- People who have weakened immune systems (like clients receiving chemo or those with HIV/AIDS).
- Household members of people who are in a high-risk group.
- People who provide essential community services, such as policemen and firefighters.
- Any person working in a health care institution, including you!

If Your Client Gets the Flu...

- Encourage clients who are congested to blow their noses frequently. If clients have a cold and do not blow out the excess mucus, the congestion often makes them feel worse. Remind clients of the best way to blow their noses: *regularly* and *gently*.
- Encourage clients who smoke to limit their intake. Smoke can be very damaging to the respiratory system making a client's cold or flu much more severe. If clients refuse to stop while they are sick, just remind them of the damaging effects and the complications that come along with the flu.
- Use standard precautions. These infection control guidelines will help you stop the spread of germs. They will also prevent you from spreading *new* germs to your already sick client.



- Excess consumption of alcohol is also very damaging to the body. Alcohol can destroy the liver—which is the body's mechanism for filtering out germs. When the liver is overworked, the chances increase for developing a serious complication of the flu.
- Remind your clients to take any medications that have been prescribed for their illness. If taken soon after the flu hits, these common drugs help shorten the infection: amantadine, rimantadine, and zanamavir.
- A warm shower or bath can be very therapeutic for your clients. The hot steam can help clear sinuses and relax your clients while they are sick.



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Is it a Cold, the Flu, or Pneumonia?

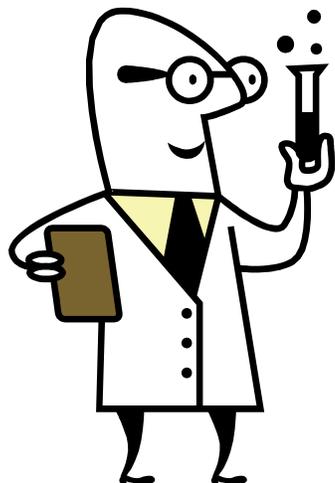
Only a doctor can diagnose whether a person has a cold, pneumonia, or the flu. But, it is important for you to know some of the basics so that you can watch out for your clients during the flu season.

- Most colds come on *slowly*. They usually start with a runny nose and sneezing, and end up with a sore throat or cough. Most colds do NOT cause a high fever.
- Even though both the common cold and the flu are caused by viruses, the flu is much more severe. All the symptoms seem to come on at once: fever, chills, headache and muscle aches. The fever is often *higher* than 101 degrees F.
- Complications from a cold are usually minor, but complications from influenza can be life threatening.
- Pneumonia can follow a cold or the flu, and causes a sudden *worsening* of symptoms. Usually, there is a high fever, and a cough that brings up yellow, green, or rust colored sputum.



What are Viruses?

Viruses are tiny parasites that live off cells within your body. In order to survive, a virus must be able to feed off something else (like a living cell). The virus itself has an outer shell to protect it while it infects a cell. Once a virus is inside a cell, it begins to spread and take control.



Recently, the Food and Drug Administration (the FDA) approved a new tool to help diagnose pneumonia. It is a test that checks a person's urine for the "strep" bacteria that often cause pneumonia. If the bacteria is found in someone's urine, it helps the doctor prescribe the correct antibiotic right away. This simple test takes 15 minutes and could help save lives!

FACTS & MYTHS

- **FACT: Together, the flu and its complications are the seventh leading cause of death in the United States, and the fifth leading cause of death in the elderly over the age of 65.** Nearly half of the people over 65 **fail** to get the flu shot every year—even though it might prevent illness, hospitalization, and even death!



- **FACT: It is impossible to get the flu from the flu vaccine.** Some clients may be afraid of getting vaccinated because they believe they might catch the flu. However, the influenza vaccine contains strains of the vaccine that have been killed and split and can only protect you from the disease—not cause it.

- **FACT: The flu can be prevented.** The best and most accurate way to prevent influenza is to get vaccinated. Vaccinations have the power to reduce the annual number of elderly deaths drastically.

- **FACT: Foods that contain phytochemicals can help to prevent influenza.**

Phytochemicals are all natural chemicals that are filled with important vitamins. Foods that contain these chemicals include fruits and red, yellow, and green vegetables.



- **MYTH: Having an upset stomach could mean that you are getting the flu.** While some clients may become queasy or sick to their stomach with the flu, it is not a common symptom—and what we call “stomach flu” is not really influenza.
- **MYTH: Being exposed to cold weather can cause a cold or influenza.** Large epidemics of the flu do occur during the winter months, but not because of the weather. According to scientists, the months between November and April are simply when the virus is most active and most likely to spread. (Unlike a cold or the flu, pneumonia can be caused by cold weather.)
- **MYTH: Chicken soup really does have the power to cure.** Unfortunately, chicken soup cannot relieve a cold or the flu. However, any type of hot liquid may help to calm a sore throat and/or prevent dehydration. 
- **MYTH: When you have the flu, it is important to refrain from all exercise or activity, and just stay in bed.** While getting plenty of rest will help, it is also important to remain as active as possible. Activity encourages good circulation and increases the amount of virus-killing cells within the body.
- **MYTH: It is not necessary to be vaccinated annually.** The flu virus is constantly changing. Every year the vaccine is adapted to fit the new strain of the virus. Last year’s vaccine will not protect you from this year’s flu bug.

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What About the Flu Vaccine?

No matter what your age, a flu vaccine is always beneficial. It is the best way to prevent the influenza virus, even for the elderly. A flu vaccination is also the leading mode of protection against pneumonia, hospitalization, and death. So, it is extremely important for you to encourage your clients to get an annual flu shot. Here are a few things that you might not know about the flu vaccine:

- Flu shots (vaccines) have helped control the spread of illness since the late 1940's.
- The best time to get a flu shot is in October or November.
- Protection develops about 2 weeks after getting the shot and may last up to a year.

- Some people may still get the flu—even after getting the vaccine—but they will usually get a milder case than if they had skipped the shot.



- Mild reactions to the flu shot are fairly common but only last a day or two. They include soreness, redness,

or swelling at the site where the shot was given; a low grade fever; mild body aches.

- Life-threatening allergic reactions are very rare. If they do occur, it is within a few minutes to a few hours after the shot. Watch for these signs of an allergic reaction: difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness. Report any problems to your supervisor immediately.

**October 12-18 is known as
National Adult Immunization
Awareness Week!**



Who Should NOT Be Vaccinated?

Some people believe that vaccinations can do more harm than good. This is far from the truth. However, there are some cases in which clients should not receive a vaccination:

- Any client who is allergic to eggs should not get a flu vaccine. The influenza vaccine is "grown" inside of chicken eggs and can cause a serious reaction in someone who is allergic to eggs.
- If a client tells you that they have previously had a severe reaction to the vaccine, be sure to let your supervisor know. It's possible that the client could have a negative reaction again.
- Someone who has a fever or is severely ill at the time the shot is scheduled should probably wait until he or she has recovered before getting the influenza vaccine.

Have You Heard About the New Flu



Do you think more people would get a flu vaccine if it didn't involve getting a shot?

FluMist—a new *nasal* vaccine was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in June 2003, but only for those between the ages of 5 and 49. Flu-Mist uses a live virus where the traditional flu shots use a dead virus.

Rather than a shot, the FluMist is a snort! The vaccine is sprayed through each nostril, and has been proven not to cause infection. It is a painless way to be vaccinated and may increase the number of people who get yearly vaccinations.

Did You Know?

- It is estimated that 90 million Americans are infected with influenza every flu season. This number seems small compared to the one billion people who get colds every year. Unfortunately, the flu can be a lot deadlier than a cold.
- Every year, as many as 24 million people require medical attention because of the flu. However, over 60 percent of people suffering from the flu never seek medical care.
- According to the CDC, more than 100,000 people are hospitalized and over 20,000 deaths occur from the flu every year.
- Over 90% of deaths due to the flu and its complications are in elderly persons 65 years and older.
- The flu vaccine has the ability to not only reduce the number of elderly deaths by 85%, but also reduce hospitalizations by close to 75%!



- Clients with diabetes are not only at a greater risk of developing complications from the flu, but also are three times more likely to die from influenza.
- The yearly medical costs of influenza are estimated to be \$14.6 billion. This cost includes all visits to the hospital, doctor's office and medications.
- The actual influenza virus is so tiny that an estimated 3,500 of them can fit onto the head of a pin.
- We already know how contagious the flu virus is, but what about how fast it is? One sneeze can travel through the air at 80 miles per hour and can reach a distance as far as 30 feet away!



REMEMBER...Wash your hands, follow standard infection control precautions and get your annual flu vaccine!



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Are you “in the know” about the flu? **Circle the best choice, or fill in your answer. Then check your answers with your supervisor!**

1. TRUE or FALSE

The flu is the same as a bad cold.

2. TRUE or FALSE

It is necessary to get a flu shot every year to be protected against the illness.

3. TRUE or FALSE

The flu germ is spread through the air.

4. TRUE or FALSE

The flu virus cannot live on objects like telephones and doorknobs.

5. TRUE or FALSE

It is especially risky for people with HIV or AIDS to get the flu.

6. Colds are different from the flu because:

- A. Colds are caused by bacteria.
- B. Colds are spread through direct contact.
- C. Standard precautions can't stop the spread of cold germs.
- D. Colds occur mainly in the spring each year.

7. People who are allergic to _____ should not get the flu vaccine.

8. Which of the following actions does not help prevent flu complications?

- A. Handwashing.
- B. Avoiding stress.
- C. Eating bananas.
- D. Dressing appropriately for the weather.

9. TRUE or FALSE

People who eat a balanced diet are less likely to “catch” a cold or flu.

10. TRUE or FALSE

If health care workers ignore infection control, they can spread the flu to their clients.

EMPLOYEE NAME (Please print):

DATE: _____

- *I understand the information presented in this inservice.*
- *I have completed this inservice and answered at least eight of the test questions correctly.*

EMPLOYEE SIGNATURE:

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE:

Inservice Credit:

<input type="checkbox"/> Self Study	1 hour
<input type="checkbox"/> Group Study	1 hour

File completed test in employee's personnel file.