



Seasonal Flu and Pandemic Flu: The Facts

Pandemic flu is a widespread outbreak of a new influenza virus for which the general population has developed little or no immunity. In Colorado, as many as one in four people could become sick, and potentially die, during such an outbreak. Efforts to contain a pandemic will be challenging because there will be little time to research, develop and distribute an effective vaccine.

Experts cannot predict when the next flu pandemic may occur, however, a pandemic has occurred three times in the past century in the United States – including Colorado – and most experts believe one will occur again and inevitably reach our state.

Economic Impact

A pandemic outbreak will significantly impact the state's economy by increasing employee absenteeism, closing schools, forcing businesses to alter operations and disrupting the distribution of goods and services. Specifically, a severe pandemic flu outbreak could:

- Impact the Colorado economy with an estimated \$11.7 billion loss¹
- Result in an estimated 30,000 deaths and 1.4 million illnesses throughout the state²

What is the Difference?

Seasonal Flu	Pandemic Flu
Caused by influenza viruses that are similar to those already affecting people. Flu vaccinations are available every year to protect against seasonal flu.	Caused by a new influenza virus that people have not been exposed to before. Flu vaccinations may not be available during the beginning of the pandemic because large amounts of vaccine cannot be made until medical researchers understand the dynamics of the new virus.
Symptoms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fever • dry cough • sore throat • headache • muscle pain 	Symptoms will be similar to seasonal flu, but may be more severe and complications could be more serious.
Healthy adults are usually not at risk for serious complications. The very young, the elderly and people with respiratory and chronic illnesses are at increased risk for serious complications, such as pneumonia or even death.	Everyone is at risk. Even healthy adults may face a higher risk for serious complications.
The more common flu that spreads each winter generally causes a modest impact on society,	A severe pandemic could change daily life for some time. People may choose to stay home

¹ Trust for America's Health

² Trust for America's Health

for example, some schools are closed and sick people are encouraged to stay home.

or be forced to stay home if they are sick or need to care for others. Travel and public gatherings could be limited. Basic services and access to supplies could be disrupted.

Every year, the seasonal flu

- Kills 36,000 Americans – the equivalent of a September 11 World Trade Center disaster every month for a year.
- Kills more Americans each year than breast cancer and three times as many as HIV/AIDS.
- Is related to one out of every 20 deaths in the United States among those older than age 65. Overall nearly one in 1,000 Americans will die of influenza and its complications each winter.
- Hospitalizes more than 200,000 people from complications.
- Results in countless preventable deaths. In 2003, there were 619 deaths in Colorado due to influenza and pneumonia, including 12 children.

Get Ready: Things You Can Do

The Colorado Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response (OEPR) and the Colorado Influenza and Pneumococcal Alert Coalition (CIPAC) are working together to inform and vaccinate Colorado residents. The following are some easy flu prevention habits that all Coloradans should incorporate into their daily lives:

Healthy Habits

The flu spreads from person to person directly through droplets propelled by a cough or sneeze of an infected person, which can get deposited on the mouths or noses of people nearby. Less frequently, the viruses can be spread indirectly when a person touches infected droplets on another person or object and then touches their own mouth or nose without washing their hands. You can help stop the spread of germs by following these guidelines:

- **Wash your hands.** Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand rub if you cannot wash your hands. Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes.
- **Cover your cough.** Always use a tissue to cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze – do not use your hands. Throw used tissues in the trash. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve if you do not have a tissue.
- **Stay at home when you are sick**
- **Clean surfaces.** Clean commonly used surfaces with a household disinfectant or a mixture of 1/4 cup chlorine bleach and one gallon of cool water. Clean anything that you touch with your mouth or hands, like your telephone, door handles and refrigerator door.

Flu Vaccination

Obtaining a flu vaccination each year is one of the best ways Colorado residents can protect themselves from contracting seasonal flu. Flu vaccinations are proven effective in protecting people against the seasonal flu and do not cause people to contract the flu. In fact, research demonstrates that while influenza vaccine efficacy varies by the similarity of the vaccine strain(s) to the circulating strain and the age and health status of the recipient, flu vaccines are effective in protecting up to 90 percent of healthy persons younger than 65 years of age.³ While some people may experience “flu-like” symptoms after receiving a flu vaccination (such as headache and minor muscle pain), these are reactions to the vaccination and not the actual flu.

³ Epidemiology and Prevention of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases, January 2007 (10th edition), Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
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www.WhatIfColorado.com
Additional resources from www.getready.gov
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Who should get a flu vaccination?

All citizens are at risk of contracting the flu and should obtain a flu vaccination. However, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) identifies the following groups as most at risk:

- People ages 65 and older
- Residents of long-term care facilities
- People ages two to 64 with compromised immune systems or respiratory and chronic illnesses
- Children ages six to 23 months
- Pregnant women
- Healthcare personnel who provide direct patient care
- Household contacts and caregivers of children younger than six months of age

Where can people find flu vaccination clinic locations?

Information about influenza and where to get flu shots is available through your local health department, on the CIPAC website: www.immunizecolorado.com or by calling the Colorado Help Line: 1-877-462-2911.

Who should NOT get a flu vaccination?

- People with a severe allergy to eggs or a vaccine component
- Anyone with a fever, an acute respiratory infection or other active infection or illness
- People with a history of Guillain Barre Syndrome

How soon will I get sick if I am exposed to the flu?

Once a person is exposed to a flu virus, symptoms can begin after about one to four days, with an average of two days.

For how long is a person with flu virus contagious?

The duration of contagiousness depends upon the age of the person. Adults may be contagious from one day prior to becoming sick and for three to seven days after they first develop symptoms. Children may be contagious for longer than a week.

When should I get a flu vaccination?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people at high risk get a vaccination by Oct. 24, 2007. Anyone can get a vaccination after Oct. 24. Flu activity in the United States generally peaks between late December and early March.

Does flu vaccine work right away?

No. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against influenza virus infection. In the meantime, individuals are still at risk for getting the flu.

Can I get the flu even though I got a flu vaccine this year?

Yes. The ability of flu vaccine to protect a person depends on:

1. The age and health status of the person getting the vaccine.
2. The similarity or "match" between the virus strains in circulation and the seasonal vaccine that's provided.