



# Health Alert!

## It's Flu Season—Here's How To Avoid The Bug

(NAPSA)—While flu season in the U.S. historically starts in October, most of us don't think about it until either we get sick or a family member or co-worker does, and by then, it may be too late. One of the few facts about flu season is that it's always unpredictable and may peak at any time in the fall, winter or even spring months.

That's why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people get the flu shot each year as soon as vaccine is available.

Many Americans do just that—however, as a society it seems we've become more reactive when it comes to flu season, and data supports it. A notable behavioral shift over the past few years has seen a considerable percentage of the population waiting to get their flu shots until flu activity becomes widespread. And that may not be the wisest choice.

"It takes up to two weeks for the body to build full immunity following a flu shot, and you're significantly increasing your chances of getting sick if you wait until the last minute when flu is already circulating in your community," said Harry Leider, M.D., Walgreens chief medical officer. "Sometimes, people can get complacent after a couple of mild flu seasons, but the past two years we've seen how far-reaching the impact of a severe season can be, and why it's so important to get a flu shot early as the best way to protect yourself and those around you."

### Flu Shots: The Earlier, the Better

Flu activity most commonly peaks in the U.S. in February and January, respectively, but in recent years has peaked earlier, including hitting a December high



**Experts from the CDC recommend getting a flu shot as soon as the vaccine becomes available. You can get them at your local pharmacy.**

just last season. Flu cases can be reported as early as September and October, as was the case in 2013, and the season can run through spring months of March or April.

While flu shots are particularly important for the very young, the elderly and pregnant women, the flu can be very serious for anyone, including young and healthy adults. Last season, patients between 18 and 64 years of age accounted for nearly 60 percent of flu-related hospitalizations reported to the CDC. And with this population, that can also mean lost workdays, child care issues and other economic repercussions.

Flu-associated hospitalization rates last season remained highest among people 65 and older, followed by those 50 to 64 years old with the second-highest hospitalization rate.

### An Everyday Effort

An annual flu shot is the best preventive measure you can take, but Dr. Leider says there are small, everyday tips that can also help keep you healthy throughout the always unpredictable flu season. Dr. Leider recommends:

1. **Wash your hands**—this may sound simple, but always make sure to wash your hands to

help protect yourself from any germs and bacteria. Sanitizers are also effective and often found in many public venues for those who don't carry their own

2. **Cover your nose and mouth**—if you cough or sneeze, cover the germs! This helps ensure that you don't spread any germs to your peers. And don't forget to wash your hands afterward.

3. **Stay home if you're sick**—if you're not feeling well, that doesn't mean that everyone else around you has to feel awful, too. If you're sick, stay home! It's one of the easiest ways to prevent others from catching your germs.

4. **Stay hydrated while traveling**—dehydration can be a contributor to illness, so always drink plenty of water, especially while flying.

5. **Other good health guidelines**—make sure you're eating healthy and getting enough sleep at night. Making sure your overall lifestyle is healthy can prevent you from getting sick...or worse if you're already feeling ill.

### Your Local Pharmacy Can Help

Walgreens pharmacies offer flu shots daily with no appointment needed, and in most states, offer a wide range of 17 CDC-recommended vaccines, including those to protect against shingles, pneumonia, pertussis (whooping cough), meningitis, hepatitis and others.

And when you get a shot, you'll be helping to provide one for a child in need in a developing country. Through a partnership with the U.N. Foundation, Walgreens is donating the value of a lifesaving vaccine, primarily polio and measles, for immunizations administered at its pharmacies and Healthcare Clinics.

To learn more, please visit [www.Walgreens.com/GetAShot](http://www.Walgreens.com/GetAShot).