

Safety Circular

December 2019

Cold, Flu, and Germ Season

It's that time of year again when the flu virus makes its annual rounds. If you end up being one of the lucky people who do not get sick this season, then you will probably know somebody who does. It's one of those things that is pretty hard to escape, especially when you frequent high traffic public places like gyms, hospitals and public transportation. Each one of us is bound to come in close contact with the flu virus at some point this season, but the key is how we protect ourselves against it which means following the proper precautions.

And by all means, be considerate of those around you. If you don't feel well or have a cough, do your coworker a favor and steer clear of them until you're feeling better.

Keeping hands clean through improved hand hygiene is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing hands with soap and clean, running water.

CLEAN HANDS SAVES LIVES

First Line of Defense

Cold viruses can be transmitted in one of two ways: by touching respiratory secretions on a person's skin (when shaking hands, for example) or on environmental surfaces (like doorknobs or handrails) and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth, or by inhaling infectious particles in the air (like respiratory secretions from a cough or sneeze).

The best way to break the chain of infection is hand washing? Hand washing is the key, along with not touching the nose, eyes or mouth.

To minimize the spread, other helpful measures include avoiding close, prolonged exposure to people with colds, and always sneezing or coughing into a facial tissue and immediately throwing it away.

Cleaning environmental surfaces with a virus-killing disinfectant is also recommended.

Still, the best form of protection is prevention. Since we work with a large population in a relatively enclosed area, cleanliness is essential. Get into the practice of washing your hands frequently. Avoid close contact with others.



What is the right way to wash your hands?

- Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold) and apply soap.
- Rub your hands together to make a lather and scrub them well; be sure to scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- Continue rubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- Rinse your hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

When Should You Wash Your Hands?

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After using the toilet
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching an animal or animal waste
- After handling pet food or pet treats
- After touching garbage

Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to reduce the number of germs on them. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



PREVENTION

Flu Vaccines

There are currently two vaccine options, the flu shot and the nasal spray vaccine.

The shot gives more reliable protection and the spray is recommended only for non-high risk groups.

The best tool for preventing the flu is the flu vaccine, and the best time to get a flu vaccine is from early October to mid-November.

The vaccine can also be given at any point during the flu season, even if the virus has already begun to spread in your community.

You need a flu vaccine every year because the virus is constantly changing and new vaccines are developed annually to protect against new strains.

Who Should Get a Flu Shot?

- Adults 50 years or older.
- All children aged 6-23 months.
- Adults and children ages 2-64 with chronic medical conditions, especially asthma, other lung diseases, and heart disease.
- All women who will be pregnant during the influenza season.
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities.
- Health-care workers involved in direct patient care.
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than 6 months old.
- Any person who wishes to avoid the flu.

Remember, no vaccine is 100% protective and the flu vaccine is no exception. Sometimes a person who has been vaccinated will still come down with the flu. Consult your doctor to ensure that you are a candidate for the vaccine.

Please take care of yourself this flu season.

The Agency is Counting on You!

The agency is dependent on you and the skills you possess to continue to operate the agency in a safe and efficient manner. In order to perform at your best, you need to be able to make clear and concise decisions.

Not feeling well or combating a cold or flu could inhibit your ability to do so. In our business, inattentiveness and/or poor decision making can lead to disastrous results.

It doesn't matter whether you are working the Administrative Segregation wing on a unit or you are in front of a computer all day that is miles away from the nearest razor wire, your decisions have an impact on the agency. It is imperative that you keep yourself healthy.

First, with all of the attention that various strains of the flu are getting lately, determining which is which can get rather confusing.

FLU TYPES DEFINED

- Seasonal (or common) flu is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.
- *Avian (or bird) flu* is caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally among wild birds. The H5N1 variant is deadly to domestic fowl and can be transmitted from birds to humans. There is no human immunity and no vaccine is available.
 - *Pandemic flu* is a virulent human flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness. Because there is little natural immunity, the disease can spread easily from person to person. Currently, there is no pandemic flu.
 - *Noroviruses* are a group of related, single-stranded RNA, non-enveloped viruses that cause acute gastroenteritis in humans. Noroviruses spread from person to person, through contaminated food or water, and by touching contaminated surfaces.
 - *2009 H1N1* virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing, sneezing or talking by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.



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References: ♦ tdcj.texas.gov ♦ osha.gov ♦