Influenza ("flu") is a contagious disease.

It is caused by the influenza virus, which can be spread by coughing, sneezing, or nasal secretions.

Anyone can get influenza, but rates of infection are highest among children. For most people, symptoms last only a few days. They include:

- fever
- sore throat
- chills
- fatigue
- cough
- headache
- muscle aches

Other illnesses can have the same symptoms and are often mistaken for influenza.

Infants, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with certain health conditions – such as heart, lung or kidney disease or a weakened immune system – can get much sicker. Influenza can cause high fever and pneumonia, and make existing medical conditions worse. It can cause diarrhea and seizures in children. Each year thousands of people die from seasonal influenza and even more require hospitalization.

By getting vaccinated you can protect yourself from influenza and may also avoid spreading influenza to others.

There are two types of influenza vaccine:

1. **Live, attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV)** contains live but attenuated (weakened) influenza virus. It is sprayed into the nostrils.
2. **Inactivated (killed) influenza vaccine**, or the "flu shot," is given by injection into the muscle. This vaccine is described in a separate Vaccine Information Statement.

Influenza viruses are always changing, so annual vaccination is recommended. Each year scientists try to match the viruses in the vaccine to those most likely to cause flu that year.

The 2010 – 2011 vaccine provides protection against A/H1N1 (pandemic) influenza and two other influenza viruses– influenza A/H3N2 and influenza B. It will not prevent illness caused by other viruses.

It takes up to 2 weeks for protection to develop after the vaccination. Protection lasts about a year.

LAIV does not contain thimerosal or other preservatives.
Tell your healthcare provider if you ever had Guillain-Barré Syndrome (a severe paralytic illness, also called GBS). Your provider will help you decide whether the vaccine is recommended for you.

Tell your healthcare provider if you have gotten any other vaccines in the past 4 weeks.

Anyone with a nasal condition serious enough to make breathing difficult, such as a very stuffy nose, should get the flu shot instead.

People who are moderately or severely ill should usually wait until they recover before getting flu vaccine. If you are ill, talk to your healthcare provider about whether to reschedule the vaccination. People with a mild illness can usually get the vaccine.

5 When should I receive influenza vaccine?

Getting the vaccine as soon as it is available will provide protection if the flu season comes early. You can get the vaccine as long as illness is occurring in your community.

Influenza can occur any time, but most influenza occurs from November through May. In recent seasons, most infections have occurred in January and February. Getting vaccinated in December, or even later, will still be beneficial in most years.

Adults and older children need one dose of influenza vaccine each year. But some children younger than 9 years of age need two doses to be protected. Ask your healthcare provider.

Influenza vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines.

6 What are the risks from LAIV?

A vaccine, like any medicine, could possibly cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of a vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small.

Live influenza vaccine viruses very rarely spread from person to person. Even if they do, they are not likely to cause illness.

LAIV is made from weakened virus and does not cause influenza. The vaccine can cause mild symptoms in people who get it (see below).

Mild problems:
Some children and adolescents 2-17 years of age have reported:

- runny nose, nasal congestion or cough
- headache and muscle aches
- abdominal pain or occasional vomiting or diarrhea

Some adults 18-49 years of age have reported:

- runny nose or nasal congestion
- cough, chills, tiredness/weakness
- sore throat
- headache

Severe problems:

- Life-threatening allergic reactions from vaccines are very rare. If they do occur, it is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

- If rare reactions occur with any product, they may not be identified until thousands, or millions, of people have used it. Millions of doses of LAIV have been distributed since it was licensed, and the vaccine has not been associated with any serious problems.

The safety of vaccines is always being monitored. For more information, visit:

www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Vaccine_Monitoring/Index.html
and

www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Activities/Activities_Index.html

7 What if there is a severe reaction?

What should I look for?
Any unusual condition, such as a high fever or behavior changes. Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness.

What should I do?
• Call a doctor, or get the person to a doctor right away.
• Tell the doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when the vaccination was given.
• Ask your healthcare provider to report the reaction by filing a Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) form. Or you can file this report through the VAERS website at www.vaers.hhs.gov, or by calling 1-800-822-7967.

VAERS does not provide medical advice.

8 The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) was created in 1986.

Persons who believe they may have been injured by a vaccine can learn about the program and about filing a claim by calling 1-800-338-2382, or visiting the VICP website at www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation.

9 How can I learn more?

• Ask your healthcare provider. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
• Call your local or state health department.
• Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
  - Call 1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO) or
  - Visit CDC’s website at www.cdc.gov/flu