

Don't let the flu catch you!

8 tips to beat the bug:

- 1.) Get vaccinated
- 2.) Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue
- 3.) Wash your hands often
- 4.) Use hand-sanitizing gels
- 5.) Clean hard surfaces with soap and water
- 6.) Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- 7.) Stay home if you're sick
- 8.) Stay HEALTHY! Get regular checkups, eat well and exercise daily

Flu season is already underway. It's imperative that we have access to information at all times and remind family, friends and neighbors of what they can do to prevent the flu. Remember, prevention is the best offense, so take precautions, stay informed and do what you can to keep our community and 'ohana healthy.

What is the flu?

The flu is a respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus. It is not the common cold. Unlike the cold, the flu can cause severe illness and possibly life-threatening complications. The flu can weaken the immune system, leaving it vulnerable to more serious and dangerous infection.

The flu changes and adapts rapidly by genetically mutating according to the environment and the carrier. That is why the flu vaccine is updated annually to meet genetic changes or modification made to the virus. The most recognizable symptom of any type of flu is the presence of a fever.

The flu is a seasonal illness which peaks around November and continues through May. It is a highly transferable by touch and other kinds of contact such as coughing, sneezing, and even talking. The seasonal flu kills 30 - 40,000 people each year. Antibiotics do not cure the flu. Antiviral medicines (available from your doctor or health clinic) can lessen flu symptoms. Flu symptoms include fever and any of the following: coughing, sneezing, vomiting, diarrhea, runny nose, congestion and/or chills.

What should I do if I think I may have the flu?

If you think that you may have the flu, you should not go to work or school. Stay home and contact your medical care provider who will direct you accordingly. Wash your hands frequently and cover your sneeze or cough with a tissue to help prevent the spread of the virus. Don't forget to get yourself and your family vaccinated.

Seasonal flu vs. H1N1 flu virus

Who is impacted? Symptoms of the two viruses are very similar, but the risk groups are not. Unlike the seasonal flu, the novel H1N1 flu has been infecting a higher rate of pregnant women, young children, and those between the ages of 6 months and 24 years. The infection rate is the lowest in people 65 years and older.

How many vaccinations? Because the seasonal flu vaccine is unlikely to provide protection against 2009 H1N1 influenza, a 2009 H1N1 vaccine has been in production and is now available to first responders. The vaccine is expected to be available to the rest of the public in November. The 2009 H1N1 flu shot is intended to be used alongside the seasonal flu vaccine; it is NOT a replacement. Like the seasonal flu vaccine, getting an H1N1 vaccine is recommended, especially for target groups, but it is not mandatory.

So, where can I get my flu shots?

You can get your seasonal flu shots from your medical care provider or at a number of flu shot community clinics offered by the State Department of Health in partnership with venue locations, HMSA and HMA. Go to www.hawaii.gov/health to find a location near you. For the H1N1 vaccine, visit www.hawaii.gov/health/about/H1N1.html for more information.

*Based on information from the Hawaii Department of Health (www.hawaii.gov/health) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/flu).

**Compiled by the Hawaii State Legislature.