

## PH... in a Nutshell



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*For the Nogales International*

**You asked...** is it too late to receive the flu vaccine? My advice, get your flu vaccine if you've not already done so. The flu, also known as influenza, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by several types of influenza viruses. Flu season usually begins October-November winding down by March-April. Several factors play a role in determining whether or not you become sick during flu season to include age, ability of your immune system to respond to the virus, and vaccination status (did you receive the yearly influenza vaccine). Another factor has to do with the ability of virologists and others at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to accurately forecast the likelihood of specific influenza viruses that will circulate during the next flu season. Sophisticated modeling software tools, statistics and knowledge of the previous year's flu viruses are used to calculate this. Then, if you know based on the predictions the type of influenza viruses that will be circulating during the upcoming season, an effective vaccine can be made in advance...not a simple task! Vaccine development requires many months of research and preparation before it becomes available. You may recall from previous years a shortage of flu vaccines; this year we have an excess due to a fairly mild flu season (tap on wood)!

The flu can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Every year in the U.S., on average 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu; more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and about 36,000 people die from flu. Some people are at high risk for flu complications such as the elderly, young children, and folks with certain health conditions.

Flu symptoms include fever, headache, being very tired, dry cough, sore throat, and a stuffy or runny nose. Some folks may experience nausea, diarrhea and vomiting, though these symptoms are more common in children. Folks that are sick with the flu spread the flu viruses person to person by coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. One of the best ways to stop the spread of the virus to others is by covering your mouth when you cough, using a Kleenex when you sneeze, and washing your hands with warm water and soap frequently for about 20 seconds to get rid of the germs!

Remember, the best way to reduce your chances of getting sick with the flu is thru the yearly flu vaccination. It takes about two weeks after receiving your flu shot for antibodies to develop that protect you against influenza virus infection. Fortunately, because of a relatively mild influenza season (so far) in this part of the country, unused flu vaccines are available at several locations throughout the state. Free influenza vaccine for children ages 6 months thru 18 years of age is being offered through the Mariposa Community Health Center in Nogales. Finally, consult your health-care provider if you have questions about whether you should get a flu vaccine. In a nutshell...it is not too late to get your flu vaccine.