

**STANDING STRONG**

this flu season

Important information about influenza for people with

**heart disease**



If you have **heart disease**, you need to take special care with your health during flu season. People with cardiac problems are especially at risk to complications from a flu infection.



Because of this risk, it is important to get yourself **vaccinated** against the flu.

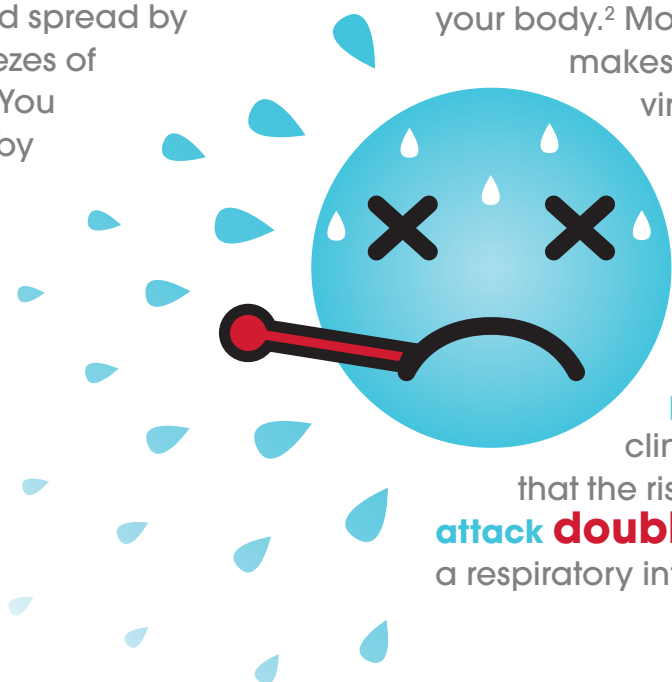
## WHAT IS THE FLU?

Influenza is a very common viral infection that can cause you to have a fever, the chills, fatigue, a dry cough, a runny nose, a sore throat, muscle aches and a loss of appetite. It is much **more than a bad cold**; many people feel unable to work or carry on as normal if they have the flu. It is **highly infectious** and spread by the coughs and sneezes of people who have it. You can also pick up flu by touching something like a door handle if someone who has flu has touched it before you. Some people with flu develop very serious complications, even if they've been in good health before it.

## WHY IS THE FLU MORE SERIOUS FOR PEOPLE WITH HEART DISEASE?

When you have heart disease your heart is unable to pump blood around the body as well as it should. This makes it more difficult to eliminate waste products properly leading to a buildup of fluid in your lungs and other parts of your body.<sup>2</sup> More fluid in your lungs

makes it harder to clear the flu virus and fight the disease as effectively as people without heart disease. This can make you more likely to develop other dangerous infections such as **pneumonia**.<sup>3</sup> In addition, clinical studies have shown that the risk of having a **heart attack doubles** in the week following a respiratory infection such as the flu.<sup>4</sup>



# HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST THE FLU?

You can protect yourself by getting a flu vaccine as soon as it is available so that you are protected should the flu season start early. Because the flu viruses can change every year, it is recommended that adults **get vaccinated annually**. A new vaccine is produced each year to protect you against the flu strains expected to be most common during the upcoming flu season. You can get your flu shot as long as cases of influenza are occurring in your community.

It is also highly recommended that **family members and caregivers of those with heart diseases** be vaccinated each year as well.



## HOW DOES THE FLU VACCINE WORK?

The flu vaccine contains a killed (inactive) form of the virus that will not cause the flu, but does activate your immune system to fight off a live flu virus. When you get a flu vaccine, your body recognizes the flu virus as a foreign invader and produces antibodies to it. The next time your body encounters the flu virus, it will remember that it is a hostile invader and quickly launch an immune attack to kill off the virus.

Because the flu vaccine may contain some amount of egg protein, patients with severe allergies to eggs may have a reaction to the vaccine. If you have any severe allergies to eggs, or other substances, you should notify your doctor prior to getting a flu shot.

To find out more about the flu or to schedule your flu vaccination, **contact your healthcare provider.**



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#### FOOTNOTES:

1. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/heartdisease/index.htm> Accessed December 2012
2. [http://www.heartfailurematters.org/English\\_Lang/UnderstandingHeartFailure/Pages/Whatishheartfailure.aspx](http://www.heartfailurematters.org/English_Lang/UnderstandingHeartFailure/Pages/Whatishheartfailure.aspx) Accessed June 2011
3. Musher DM. In: Mandell GL, Bennett JE, Dolin R, eds. Principles and Practice of Infectious Diseases, 4th Edition Churchill Livingstone; 1994 p1811-1826
4. Corrales-Medina VF, Madjid M, Musher DM. Role of acute infection in triggering acute coronary syndromes. Lancet Infect Dis 2010; 10: 83-92.