

# Safety Newsletter

February, 2014

## This Month's Topic: Workplace Safety & Precautions During Flu Season

The number of deaths caused by this year's influenza outbreak shot up in California in the last weeks and appear to be very close to matching the death toll from the flu for all of 2013.

Flu seasons are unpredictable in a number of ways. Although epidemics of flu happen every year, the timing, severity, and length of the season varies from one year to another. Flu viruses are also constantly changing so it's not unusual for new flu virus strains to appear each year.

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. Serious outcomes of flu infection can result in hospitalization or death. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications.

### Signs and Symptoms of Flu

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- Fever\* (usually 100°F or warmer, lasting for several days)/ often with chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

*\*It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.*

### Good Health Habits Can Help Stop Germs

One of the best ways to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year, but good health habits like covering your cough and washing your hands often can help stop the spread of germs and prevent respiratory illnesses like the flu. There also are flu antiviral drugs that can be used to treat and prevent the flu.

#### **1. Avoid close contact**

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

#### **2. Stay home when you are sick**

If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.

#### **3. Cover your mouth and nose**

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.

#### **4. Clean your hands**

Handwashing is like a "do-it-yourself" vaccine—of diarrhea and respiratory illness so you can stay healthy. Regular handwashing, particularly before and after certain activities, is one of the best ways to remove germs, avoid getting sick, and prevent the spread of germs to others.

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

#### **5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth**

Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth

*"At the height of flu season, I'd recommend that everyone gets vaccinated and maintain good health habits. Stay at home until fully recovered if you do get sick. Prevention is your best assurance to staying healthy and in preventing lost work days."*

**Kevin Geroy**

*Construction & Field Resources  
Manager,  
Alisto Engineering Group, Inc.*

### **Cold vs. Flu**

The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense. Colds are usually milder than the flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.



### **The Flu Is Contagious!**

Most healthy adults may be able to infect other people beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Symptoms start 1 to 4 days after the virus enters the body. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

### **Is there treatment for the flu?**

Yes. If you get sick, there are drugs that can treat flu illness. They are called antiviral drugs and they can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They also can prevent serious flu-related complications, like pneumonia.

### **When to go to an emergency room**

You should go directly to an emergency room for further evaluation and treatment if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Bluish skin color
- Confusion or sudden dizziness
- Persistent or severe vomiting

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### Flu Vaccination

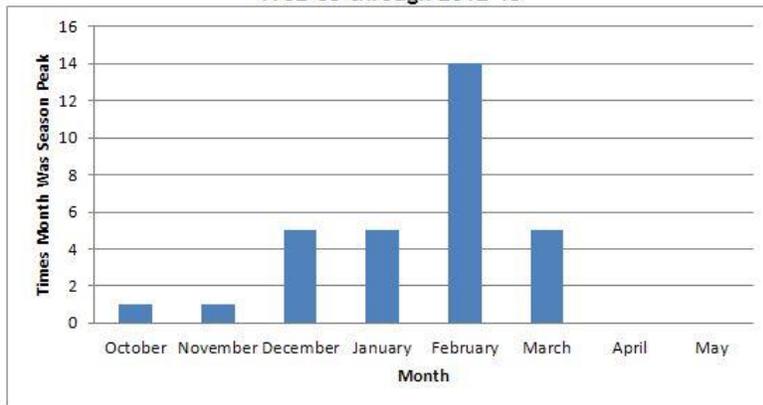
Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine.

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season.

Traditional flu vaccines (called "trivalent" vaccines) are made to protect against three flu viruses; an influenza A (H1N1) virus, an influenza A (H3N2) virus, and an influenza B virus. In addition, this season, there are flu vaccines made to protect against four flu viruses (called "quadrivalent" vaccines). These vaccines protect against the same viruses as the trivalent vaccine as well as an additional B virus.

There is still a possibility you could get the flu even if you got vaccinated. However, the viruses in vaccines are attenuated (weakened), and therefore cannot cause flu illness. The ability of flu vaccine to protect a person depends on various factors, including the age and health status of the person being vaccinated, and also the similarity or "match" between the viruses used to make the vaccine and those circulating in the community. If the viruses in the vaccine and the influenza viruses circulating in the community are closely matched, vaccine effectiveness is higher. If they are not closely matched, vaccine effectiveness can be reduced. However, it's important to remember that even when the viruses are not closely matched, the vaccine can still protect many people and prevent flu-related complications.

**Peak Month of Flu Activity  
1982-83 through 2012-13**



*\*During 2008-2009, flu activity peaked twice because of the 2009 H1N1 pandemic. Activity in the United States peaked once in in February due to seasonal influenza activity and then again in the Spring (June), with the first wave of 2009 H1N1 viruses A second, larger peak of 2009 H1N1 activity occurred in October, the peak of the 2009-2010 season.*

### Alisto Engineering 2013 Safety Statistics

Motor Vehicle Accidents/ Total Miles Driven (01/01/13 – 12/31/13)	Lost Work Days/ Total Work Days (01/01/13 – 12/31/13)	Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (01/01/13 – 12/31/13)
0/ 289,945 miles	0 days*/ 250 days	0*

\* From Edgewood Partners Insurance Center

### Influenza Viruses from Animals to People

Influenza A viruses are found in many different animals, including ducks, chickens, pigs, whales, horses and seals. Influenza B viruses circulate widely only among humans.

### Swine Flu

Swine influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Like human influenza viruses, there are different subtypes and strains of swine influenza viruses.

Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with swine influenza viruses have occurred. When this happens, these viruses are called "variant viruses." They also can be denoted by adding the letter "v" to the end of the virus subtype designation. Human infections with H1N1v, H3N2v and H1N2v viruses have been detected in the United States.

### Avian Flu

Avian influenza refers to the disease caused by infection with avian (bird) influenza (flu) Type A viruses. These viruses occur naturally among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species.

Although avian influenza A viruses usually do not infect humans, rare cases of human infection with avian influenza A viruses have been reported. Most human infections with avian influenza A viruses have occurred following direct or close contact with infected poultry. Illness in humans has ranged from mild to severe.

### References:

1. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.html>
2. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/index.html>
3. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season.html>
4. <http://www.sfgate.com/health/article/Deaths-from-influenza-outbreak-shoot-up-in-5153695.php>
5. <http://blog.onemedical.com/newsworthy/flu-season-2013/>
6. <http://muhammadzulidhar.wordpress.com/2011/09/17/bird-flu/>