



Kearney-Franklin Counties



CONTACT:

Susan Harris-Broomfield
Nebraska Extension Educator
Rural Health, Wellness, & Safety
308-832-0645

Do You Really Have the Flu?

We hear it often – “*I had the flu and I was in the bathroom all day!*” But is that really the flu? Probably not.

Myth #1: Having the flu means you are sick to your stomach, vomiting, and experiencing diarrhea.

Truth: Many people tend to label stomach or intestinal issues as “the flu”, when really the flu is a respiratory disease, meaning it is in your lungs. Symptoms include fever, chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, muscle aches, headache, and extreme tiredness. A few individuals, mostly children, might experience vomiting and diarrhea, but most people will not.

How do you know your illness isn’t just a bad cold? The difference between the flu and a cold is that the flu hits you suddenly and forces you to alter your normal life. It might have you so tired and achy that you won’t even want to get out of bed. With a typical cold, life goes on with the inconvenience of cold symptoms.

Influenza (the flu) is a serious illness. It is responsible for billions of dollars in medical costs and thousands of deaths each year in the United States, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. It is not something to take lightly. If you can take precautions to avoid it, why not do so?

Myth #2: The flu shot can make you sick with the flu.

Truth: The flu vaccine cannot cause you to be sick with the flu. Rarely, what *can* happen to some people is mild side effects like soreness from the shot, low-grade fever, muscle aches, or nausea that all go away within a few days. This is not because the shot gave you the flu, but could be caused by a variety of reasons like being exposed to the flu virus before or during the two-week period it takes the body to gain protection, being exposed to another flu-like illness that a flu vaccine does not protect against, or you may be one of the unlucky few whose body does not respond to a flu vaccine. While the vaccine is not a sure bet you won’t get the flu, it can reduce your risk.

Those with an allergy to eggs will experience more potentially serious side effects and should consult a physician before getting a vaccine. There are several different flu vaccines available to people of various ages and conditions. It is best to ask your doctor which is right for you or your child.

Viruses in the shot’s vaccine are killed or a particle is designed to look like a flu virus to your immune system. In the case of a nasal spray vaccine, the virus is weakened or changed in a way that cannot cause infection. If you are wondering how a dead or fake virus can possibly protect you, imagine it as a disguise to gain entrance to a place you are not allowed to be, like soldiers dressing in enemy uniforms to enter enemy territory. Once the enemy realizes they are there, they begin to protect themselves by fighting back. When the body “sees” the

enemy viruses in its system, it begins to form antibodies in a couple weeks. Later, if those same viruses enter the body in live form, the body has already built a defense system to kill them on site.

Myth #3: Going outside in the cold and getting chilled can give you a cold or the flu.

Truth: **The actual reason more colds and flu happen during winter is that people stay inside.** As people are in closer proximity to each other, there are more chances of viruses spreading. The flu virus is mainly spread through droplets from coughs and sneezes, not from cold weather. The best ways to avoid getting the flu are to avoid those with the flu, get a flu vaccine, and wash your hands often, not touching your face with your hands until they are washed. If you do get the flu, there are antiviral drugs your doctor can prescribe to help lessen symptoms, if given within a day or two of the onset of symptoms. However, it seems like a lot less hassle to just get the vaccine! In many cases, it is free – paid by your insurance provider.

Contact your local health department, clinic, hospital, or visit www.cdc.gov for more information.