

Is Seasonal Influenza a Foodborne Illness?

The flu has been rampant in South Carolina and across the US this year. Many people are unsure of how seasonal flu is spread. The following information will list the common ways in which the flu is spread, suggest precautions you can take to help avoid becoming ill and recommend ways to shorten the length of flu illness, should you get it.

How is the seasonal flu spread?

Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It is not commonly regarded as a foodborne illness; however eating food prepared by someone with the flu may allow for the spread from one person to another.

- Food handlers may transmit viruses to food if they do not wash their hands properly.
- Viruses may exist in foods but do not grow and cause food spoilage. They only grow once they enter a suitable host and then may cause illness by infection.
- Influenza viruses can be destroyed by heat (167°F - 212°F).

Most experts agree that the flu is most commonly spread when people (who are infected with the flu virus) talk, cough or sneeze spreading droplets of water into the air and into the mouths or noses of people nearby. The flu virus may also be contracted when touching a surface or object contaminated with the flu virus and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

What can I do to help prevent getting the flu?

There are several things you can do to help you avoid getting the flu.

- Consider getting the flu vaccination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers detailed information on the flu vaccine so that you can decide whether

getting vaccinated is right for you.

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/index.htm>

Avoid close contact with sick people.

- Keep your environment clean and disinfected. Avoid touching your face. Wash your hands often with soap and clean, warm, running water. Effective hand washing requires rubbing hands together for 20 seconds. Encourage family members to wash hands often.

What should I do if I get the flu?

Common symptoms of seasonal influenza are: fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people, especially children, may also have vomiting and diarrhea. Most people will experience mild symptoms and will not require medical care. However, if you feel that you are very sick or are worried you may see a doctor for a flu screening. If you test positive for the flu virus your doctor can prescribe an antiviral drug that may lighten your symptoms and shorten the length of illness. All people with flu symptoms should avoid spreading the flu by limiting contact with other people.

For more detailed information on the flu, visit the CDC at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>

Prepared by Adair Hoover, Food Safety & Preservation Program Assistant, Clemson University, 02/12.)

This information is supplied with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service is implied. All recommendations are for South Carolina conditions and may not apply to other areas. Use pesticides only according to the directions on the label. All recommendations for pesticide use are for South Carolina only and were legal at the time of publication, but the status of registration and use patterns are subject to change by action of state and federal regulatory agencies. Follow all directions, precautions and restrictions that are listed.

The Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to people of all ages, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status and is an equal opportunity employer. **Clemson University Cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture, South Carolina Counties, Extension Service, Clemson, South Carolina. Issued in Furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914**
Public Service Activities