What is the flu? The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.

Common Signs and Symptoms

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults

Someone with a mental illness may be at higher risk to get flu complications

People with mental illness have extra reason to be mindful of the flu season, particularly if they smoke, or have other medical vulnerabilities. In general, older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications. Complications from the flu can make existing illnesses more severe, lead to hospitalization and even death. Prevention is key!

The flu vaccine and psychiatric medications

Psychiatric medications can be safely taken when getting the flu shot. People with mental illness should discuss their individual risks and potential benefits of the flu shot with their health care provider. Also, people who have a severe egg allergy or have a history of Guillain-Barre syndrome (a rare type of muscle paralysis) should talk to their health care provider before getting the flu shot as it may not be recommended.

Ask your behavioral health or medical provider:

- How might the flu vaccine interact with my current psychiatric medications?
- What should I do if I think I am experiencing an adverse drug reaction?
- Where can I get the flu vaccine?

Prevent the Flu

Get vaccinated! This is the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses.

Stop the Spread

Flu viruses spread mainly from person to person by the droplets produced when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. Sometimes, people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Healthy adults may be able to pass the flu virus to others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. 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.

It’s important that if you get sick with the flu...

- Stay home from work or school, and rest
- Drink plenty of non-caffeinated fluids
- Use acetaminophen or ibuprofen to help with fever and body aches
- Wash your hands often to protect other people
- Avoid getting close to other people, especially when coughing or sneezing
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing

Learn more about the flu online at:
http://www.azhealth.gov/flu/general.htm