According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Influenza (Flu) “is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.”

Signs and Symptoms
People that have the flu will often feel some or all of following signs and symptoms:

• Fever or feeling feverish/chills. Not everyone may experience a fever
• Cough; Sore throat
• Runny or stuffy nose
• Headaches; muscle or body aches
• Fatigue
• Vomiting and diarrhea. This is more common in children than adults

Complications may arise as well such as bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions to name a few.

NOTE: People with the flu are contagious a day before the onset of symptoms and up to seven (7) days after they become sick.

Transmission
Transmission of flu viruses is usually through contact of mucosal membranes with droplets created through sneezing, coughing, or talking from an infected person. Less often is contact with a contaminated surface followed by touching one’s mouth, eyes, or nose.

Prevention
The CDC recommends getting vaccinated to protect against flu viruses. “Trivalent” vaccines protect against H1N1, H3N2, and influenza B viruses; “quadrivalent” vaccines against two influenza A and two influenza B viruses. The quadrivalent vaccine is also available in a nose spray and approved for people 2 through 49 years of age. Remember to consult your physician if you should get a vaccination.

Additionally, everyday preventative actions will aid in stopping the spread of the flu (other viruses and bacteria as well):

• Stay home from work when you’re sick
• Cover your nose and mouth with tissue when coughing or sneezing
• Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand gel sanitizer
• Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects (e.g. telephones, door handles, key boards, office equipment etc.) that may be contaminated
• Avoid close contact with people who are sick
• Maintain good health habits such as (a) getting enough sleep; (b) having a balanced diet; (c) keeping hydrated; and (d) controlling stress.

Information obtained in part from CDC web page. Please distribute EH&S Fact Sheets electronically to department staff. Fact Sheets are intended to facilitate safety discussions in your department.