

New Ideas for Stories About Flu...By Beat



**VALUE
HEALTH**
PROTECT AGAINST
INFLUENZA

Health—Approximately 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths a year are attributed to complications of seasonal flu, but only one-third of all Americans are vaccinated. Help people in your community protect their overall health and wellness by sharing the story behind flu. What is flu? When does the season start and end? How does flu spread? What are the symptoms of flu? What should people do if they think they have contracted an influenza virus?

Health—With community awareness and concern about avian flu (and the potential for a pandemic) on the rise, it is important that people in your community know the difference between pandemic flu and seasonal flu. Pandemic flu is the result of a strain that the human body has never encountered before and has not built any immunity against, resulting in widespread cases, more complications and death. Seasonal flu presents as different strains all of the time, but is a more familiar version of the virus. Learning prevention strategies for seasonal flu now — like practicing good hygiene, getting vaccinated and maintaining overall good health — can help prepare you for pandemic flu if it happens.

National—A recent study by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases found that only half of all Americans plan on getting vaccinated against flu this year. Vaccinations against flu benefit everyone — the recipient and his or her friends, family, colleagues and community — because they help to prevent spreading the virus. Link this national story about flu to information about where local residents can access flu vaccinations through April.

Local/City/Metro—Is Virginia ready for a flu pandemic? In 2005, the federal government issued a national strategy designed to guide the response to a pandemic, should one occur. Virginia also has a detailed preparedness plan ready for implementation in the case of pandemic flu. The plan includes information about available health care resources, various government and community responsibilities, and other items crucial to containing a pandemic and minimizing its impact should one occur.

Family and Parenting—Schools, daycare and after-school programs are often channels by which germs and viruses can spread. But there is much that parents can do to safeguard their children and families from contracting influenza. Ideas include making sure that children are vaccinated against the flu, understand the importance of regularly washing hands and using good cough and sneeze etiquette.

Business—Each year, seasonal flu costs U.S. businesses billions of dollars — an estimated \$25 billion for the common cold alone, according to Business & Legal Reports — in decreased worker productivity. Promoting good hygiene and an annual flu vaccination can reduce the number of workers affected. Businesses can encourage sick employees to stay home when they are sick. They can also make sure that their office is well-stocked with sanitizing agents like wet wipes, hand sanitizers and soap to prevent spreading the virus to other employees.

Food—A healthy diet can help prevent flu! Following a healthy diet is just one component of a healthy lifestyle. Maintaining good health year round improves the body's immune system and can help prevent illnesses. Help people in your community to select foods from all of the nutrition categories and to pick the foods highest in antioxidants by sharing information about the nutritional value of foods, food preparation tips and recipe ideas.

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Personal Finance—How much does flu cost you? By flu season, many people have either planned for using any remaining paid time off before year end, have run out of sick time, or at the start of the new year haven't yet earned paid time off. While many people claim the cost of the flu shot as a deterrent for getting vaccinated, spending \$20 on the flu shot can prevent lost income incurred by taking unpaid sick time. It can also help save on costly over the counter cold and flu remedies.

Style and Living—Let people know the ten things they can do to prevent flu. Simple things like washing your hands regularly or sneezing and coughing into the crook of your arm can help prevent spreading flu to friends, family and coworkers. This is also an opportunity for people to learn about places in their community that administer flu vaccinations. See the attached document (Ten Things You Can Do to Prevent Flu) for a list of flu-prevention techniques.

Science/Technology—How does a flu vaccination work? Who should get vaccinated and what is the benefit? Who shouldn't get vaccinated and why? What do chicken eggs have to do with the flu

vaccine? Why does it matter when you get vaccinated? Take an in-depth look at the vaccination for seasonal flu, how it is developed and its role in preventing seasonal and pandemic flu.

Pop Culture—True or False? Long-believed misconceptions about flu downplay the virus, keeping people from getting vaccinated and learning preventive techniques for themselves and their families. Some myths about flu: You can get the flu from the flu vaccine. False. If you get a flu vaccine, you can't get an influenza virus. False. The flu isn't serious enough to warrant vaccination. False. Share the truth and help more people understand how flu affects them today.

Home & Garden—Flu-proof your home! Help people in your community learn ways they can prevent flu from spreading in their home. Include product tips (Which sanitation wipes work best? What's the best smelling hand sanitizer on the market?), ideas for making good hygiene a regular part of life, and strategies for keeping people in the germ- and virus-free mindset, like placing wipes next to the phone for easy cleaning.