What is influenza?

"Every year in the US, between 75 to 150 previously healthy children die after becoming infected with influenza"

Commonly known as the flu, influenza is a virus that mainly our respiratory system. Symptoms appear suddenly and include high fever, shaking chills, severe muscle aches and headache. The virus also causes a runny nose and a cough that can last for a couple of weeks.
Complications of influenza include severe, and unfortunately occasionally fatal, pneumonia.

How is influenza transmitted?

Influenza viruses are spread person-to-person via large respiratory droplets through coughing and sneezing. They may also be picked up from contaminated surfaces and then touching mucosal surfaces such as the eyes, nose, or mouth. That is why, If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.

What is the difference between an epidemic and a pandemic?

Influenza epidemics occur every year. An epidemic does not affect all people, some people already have immunity since the flu strains are not new. When new strains emerge, people do not have immunity, and, almost everyone is susceptible.

Flu pandemics occur about three times every 100 years. The pandemics of 1957 and 1968 each claimed four to six million lives. Between 50 and 100 million people died from the "Spanish flu" during the 1918 pandemic.

How can I protect my family from the flu?

- The CDC recommends a flu vaccine every year as the first and most important step in protecting against influenza

- Flu vaccines protect against the 3 or 4 viruses that research suggests will be most common. Three-component vaccines contain an H3N2, an H1N1 and a B virus. Four component vaccines have an additional B virus component.
- Flu vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, doctors' visits, and missed work and school due to flu, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations.
- Flu vaccination also has been shown to significantly reduce a child's risk of dying from influenza.
- Also, there are data to suggest that even if someone gets sick after vaccination, their illness may be milder.
- Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine every year before flu activity begins in their community. CDC recommends getting vaccinated by the end of October.

Who should be vaccinated:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older receive the influenza vaccine each year.

Children 6 months to 8 years of age require two doses of influenza vaccine separated by four weeks if they:

- Have never received an influenza vaccine
- Have not received at least two doses of influenza vaccine before July 1, 2017, (during any influenza season)
- Have an uncertain influenza vaccination history

How about infants less than 6 months of age?

Getting an influenza vaccine during pregnancy provides a woman's newborn with protection for up to six months after birth when he or she is too young to get an influenza vaccine.

Should I get the flu vaccine if I am pregnant?

Yes. Pregnant women infected with influenza virus are more likely to suffer severe illness and complications that require hospitalization than women of the same age who are not pregnant. Pregnant women infected with influenza are also at increased risk of premature labor. Ask your ObGyn about getting vaccinated.

When is the best time to receive the influenza vaccine?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend receiving the influenza vaccine as soon as it is available. Because it takes about two weeks after receiving the vaccine to be fully protected, it's important to get the vaccine early.

Seasonal influenza viruses circulate in Hawaii year-round, but are most common during the fall and winter months. The exact timing and duration of each flu season varies from year to year, but influenza activity usually begins to increase during October.

Does the influenza vaccine cause Guillain-Barre syndrome?

The influenza vaccine does not cause Guillain-Barré syndrome. In a study published in July 2013, researchers found people hospitalized with GBS were not more likely to have recently received the influenza vaccine (in the six weeks before onset) compared with those who didn't receive it recently.

Every year, between 75 and 150 previously healthy children die after becoming infected with influenza; therefore, the benefits of getting the influenza vaccine outweigh the risks.

Resources:

https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/children.htm