Influenza usually comes on suddenly. Symptoms can include high fever, chills, headaches, exhaustion, sore throat, cough, and all-over body aches. Some people say, “It felt like a truck hit me!” Symptoms can also be mild. Regardless, when influenza strikes your family, the result is lost time from work and school.

An infected person can spread influenza when they cough, sneeze, or just talk near others. They can also spread it by touching or sneezing on an object that someone else touches later. And, an infected person doesn’t have to feel sick to be contagious: they can spread influenza to others when they feel well – before their symptoms have even begun.

Each year, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized in the U.S. from influenza and its complications. Between 3,000 and 50,000 die, which shows how unpredictable influenza can be. The people most likely to be hospitalized and die are infants, young children, older adults, and people of all ages who have conditions such as heart or lung disease. But remember, it’s not only the youngest, oldest, or sickest who die: Every year influenza kills people who were otherwise healthy.

There’s no substitute for yearly vaccination in protecting the people you love from influenza. Either type of influenza vaccine (the “shot” or nasal spray) will help keep you and your loved ones safe from a potentially deadly disease. Get vaccinated every year, and make sure your children and your parents are vaccinated, too.