

Influenza (flu)

What is the flu?

The flu, is a very contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus and should not be confused with “stomach flu.” It causes mild to severe illness, and can lead to death.

How do I get influenza?

Influenza is most commonly spread when a person who has influenza coughs, sneezes, or talks. People with the flu can spread it to others up to 6 feet away who inhale the virus and it enters the nose, throat, or lungs of a person. Although not common, Influenza can be spread when a person touches a surface that has flu viruses on it and then touches his or her nose or mouth.

When is flu season?

The flu is spread year-round but flu season is officially October 1st through May 31st.

How long can a person spread the flu to others?

People are most contagious in the first three to four days after their illness begins. Most healthy adults can pass the virus to others 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 7 days after becoming sick. Children and people with weakened immune systems may pass the virus for longer than 7 days.

What are the symptoms of Flu?

Symptoms begin about 2 days after the virus enters the body. Some people may not develop symptoms but can still spread the flu to others. Symptoms usually come on suddenly and may include some or all of the follow :

- Fever
- Headache, body aches, and chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Fatigue or tiredness
- Sometimes diarrhea and vomiting



What is the treatment for influenza?

Some antiviral drugs, when started within the first 2 days of illness, can reduce the duration of the disease. Anti-viral drugs must be prescribed by a doctor.

(over)

What are complications of the flu?

Most people who develop flu will recover in a few days to a few weeks but some people may develop complications such as:

- Sinus and ear infections
- Pneumonia
- Inflammation of the heart, brain, or muscle tissue
- Multi organ failure
- Worsening of chronic medical problems
- Death

Who is at risk for developing complications?

- Children under the age of 5
- Adults 65 years of age and older residents living in nursing homes
- Pregnant women
- Those with chronic underlying medical conditions including asthma, heart disease, and diabetes

When should children or adults be excluded from schools or childcare centers?

EXCLUDE children, students, and staff with flu-like symptoms from childcare, school, or work until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Separate ill children, students



Why does the health department investigate Influenza?

- To track how many people are getting the disease and to limit the number of people exposed.
- To investigate outbreaks of Influenza in an attempt to prevent the further spread of illness.
- To identify people at risk of infection and make recommendations to prevent them from getting ill.
- Schools, child care centers, and long term care facilities work closely with the health department to limit the spread of influenza in their facilities.



How do I prevent flu?

- Immunization is the most effective way to prevent flu.
- Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine every season.



- Vaccination to prevent influenza is particularly important for people who are at high risk of serious complications. Vaccination can decrease risk of severe flu illness.
- Use proper hand hygiene often including washing hands and using hand sanitizers.



- If you have been exposed to someone with flu, and have a high risk for complications, see a medical provider. Antiviral medications are available to prevent illness.