

Influenza (“The Flu”)

Fact Sheet

What is it?

Influenza (the flu) is a disease that primarily affects people's airways and lungs. It is caused by influenza viruses that easily spread from person to person. Each flu season, several different flu viruses spread.

Flu can be very serious for:

- Infants and children (especially under 2 years of age)
- Pregnant women
- People with diabetes
- People with asthma
- People with heart or lung problems or weakened immune systems
- People who are obese
- Even healthy children and adults can get very sick from the flu

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of flu usually start about 1 to 4 days after being exposed to someone with flu.

Common symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Feeling tired (can be extreme)
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults
- In some cases, the flu can cause pneumonia and other serious complications.

How is it spread?

- Flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people nearby.
- A person can also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or nose.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

- Your doctor may diagnosis flu based on your symptoms
- Your doctor may also test a swab of the inside of your nose or back of the throat.
- Most people with flu do not need medical treatment or antiviral drugs, but people who are at high risk for severe illness (see above) should call their doctor if they develop flu symptoms.
- Doctors can prescribe anti-viral medicine to prevent severe illness; these medicines work best if given within 48 hours of getting sick.

How can flu be prevented?

The best way to prevent flu is to get a flu vaccine each year.

The flu vaccine is recommended for all people 6 months and older.

Be sure that everyone who lives with or cares for infants younger than 6 months old, pregnant women, and other people at high-risk get a flu vaccine.

You can also take these everyday steps to protect yourself and others from getting sick.

- Cover your nose and mouth with your sleeve or a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Touching these areas spreads germs.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home from work and school until at least 24 hours after your fever is gone, and avoid close contact with others when sick.



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