

Influenza (Flu)

Fact Sheet

What is it?

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that circulate year round, although flu activity usually peaks in the winter months. There are two main strains of influenza: types A and B.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Symptoms of influenza usually start suddenly, and primarily include:

- ⇒ Fever (usually high, at or above 100° F)
- ⇒ Headache, muscle and body aches
- ⇒ Extreme fatigue or tiredness
- ⇒ Dry cough

Generally the flu is a mild illness, but for those with underlying health conditions, or who are elderly, pregnant, or very young, the flu can cause serious complications.

How is influenza spread?

The virus is transmitted from person to person when individuals inhale or ingest particles from a cough or sneeze of an infected person. Influenza may also be spread when a person comes in contact with a contaminated surface or object, then makes contact with their mouth, nose, or eyes before washing their hands.

Infected persons may be contagious starting 1 day before symptoms develop, continuing 7 days or more after becoming ill. This means a person may be able to pass the flu on to others before they feel ill and after they have begun to recover. Additionally, some people can be infected with the flu virus but have mild or no symptoms; during this time, they can still spread influenza to others if they sneeze or cough.

Who should get vaccinated for influenza?

Everyone 6 months of age and older is recommended to get the flu vaccine each year. Vaccination is especially important for children under 5, adults over 65, pregnant women, individuals with other underlying health conditions, and those who live, work, or spend time in a congregate setting, as they may be at higher risk of exposure or a more severe illness.

What can be done to prevent the spread of influenza?

- ⇒ **Get vaccinated every year.** This is the single best way to prevent influenza in yourself and others.
- ⇒ **Stay home when you are sick.** Ill individuals should stay out of work, school, or childcare until they have been fever free for at least 24 hours without a fever-reducing medication. While sick, keep your distance from friends, family, and coworkers, and postpone errands until you are well again.
- ⇒ **Use good hand hygiene and cough etiquette.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and wash your hands with soap and warm water immediately after. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve, not your hands.
- ⇒ **Practice other good health habits, even when you're not sick.** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, and disinfect high-touch surfaces regularly. Adequate sleep, physical activity, stress management, and a balanced diet can all support a healthy immune system and may make you less likely to become sick or develop a severe illness.

For more information, please contact your health care provider or visit the Center's for Disease Control and Prevention webpage on Influenza: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>



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