

## FACT SHEET

### Influenza

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It's occurrence is worldwide. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. In the United States, flu season most seen during the months of October through May. While most healthy people recover from the flu without complications, some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious complications from the flu. The best way to protect yourself and those you love from getting influenza is by getting a flu shot.

[http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/a\\_flu\\_guide\\_for\\_parents.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/a_flu_guide_for_parents.pdf)

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/disease.htm>

**Cause:** Influenza Virus types A and B

**Symptoms:** The flu usually starts suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever (101 F)
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Diarrhea and vomiting also can occur but are more common in children.

In children, gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also be common.

These symptoms are referred to as "flu-like symptoms." A lot of different illnesses, including the common cold, can have similar symptoms.

Complications of influenza include middle ear infections, secondary bacterial pneumonia and exacerbation of underlying chronic health conditions.

**Spread:** The flu spreads in respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing and talking. It usually spreads from person to person, though occasionally a person may become infected by touching something with virus on it, then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. The virus can survive for hours in dried mucus especially in cold, dry environments.

**Incubation:** Once the virus enters the body it takes one to four days for symptoms to begin.

**Contagious Period:** Adults may be able to infect others 1 day before getting symptoms and five to seven days after getting sick which means you could spread the virus before you even know that you are ill. Children can be infectious for longer than seven days. Most symptoms resolve within two to seven days although the cough may persist longer

**Precautions:** Good hand washing and good cough hygiene: Cover your nose and mouth with your arm and elbow when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of tissues in proper waste cans and wash your hands with soap for 30 seconds and then use warm running water. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water is not available.

**Diagnosis and Treatment:** There are rapid tests that can determine influenza within the first 2 or 3 days of illness and influenza cultures take. A doctor's exam may be needed to determine another infection that is a complication of the flu.

**Prevention:** The single best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated each fall. Prescription *antiviral medications* are approved for use in preventing the flu. Ask your doctor.

**Wash your hands often with soap and water,** especially after you cough or sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

**Stay away as much as you can from people who are sick.** If you get the flu, stay home from work or school. If you are sick, do not go near other people so that you don't make them sick too. Stay home from work or school until fever free for 24 hours *without* the use of fever reducers.

**Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs often spread this way.

### ***Other Ways to Respond to the Flu:***

If you get the flu, get plenty of rest, drink a lot of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco. Also, you can take medications to relieve the symptoms of the flu (but never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever).

If you are at high risk from complications of the flu, you should consult your health-care provider if you develop flu-like symptoms. Those at high risk for complications include people 65 years or older, people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women and young children. Your doctor may recommend use of an antiviral medication to help treat the flu.

**Emergency Warning Signs:** There are some “emergency warning signs” that require urgent medical attention.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- ever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Seek medical care immediately (call your doctor or go to an emergency room) if you or someone you know is experiencing any of the signs above. When you arrive, tell the reception staff that you think you have the flu. You may be asked to wear a mask and/or sit in a separate area to protect others from getting sick.