

INFLUENZA

What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions are at higher risk of serious flu complications.

There are two main types of influenza (flu) viruses: Types A and B. The influenza A and B viruses that routinely spread in people (human influenza viruses) are responsible for seasonal flu epidemics each year.

Who gets influenza?

Anyone can get flu (even healthy people), and serious problems related to flu can happen at any age, but some people are at high risk of developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick. This includes people 65 years and older, pregnant women, young children and children with neurological disease, racial and ethnic minority groups, and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease and stroke, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and chronic kidney disease).

How is influenza spread?

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by tiny droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touch their own mouth, nose, or eyes.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza (flu) can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Flu is different from a cold. Flu usually comes on suddenly. People who have flu often have some or all of these symptoms:

- fever (a measured temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit [38 degrees Celsius] or greater, or feels warm to the touch, or gives a history of feeling feverish)
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle or body aches
- headaches
- fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

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How soon do symptoms appear?

The time from when a person is exposed and infected with flu to when symptoms begin is about two days but can range from about one to four days.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

All employees should stay home if they are sick until at least 24 hours after their fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or 37.8 degrees Celsius or higher) is gone. Temperature should be measured without the use of fever-reducing medicines (medicines that contain ibuprofen or acetaminophen).

What is the treatment for influenza?

If you get sick with flu, antiviral drugs may be a treatment option. When used for treatment, antiviral drugs can lessen symptoms and shorten the time you are sick by one or two days. They also can prevent serious flu complications such as pneumonia. For people at higher risk of serious flu complications, treatment with antiviral drugs can mean the difference between milder or more serious illness that possibly results in a hospital stay.

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of influenza?

The first and most important step in preventing flu is to get a flu vaccine each year. Flu vaccine has been shown to reduce flu-related illnesses and the risk of serious flu complications that can result in hospitalization or even death. To help slow the spread of germs that cause respiratory (nose, throat, and lungs) illnesses like flu, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also recommends these preventive actions:

- Get your flu vaccine every year.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or cough or sneeze into your inner elbow.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- If sick with flu-like illness, stay home for 24 hours until fever-free (temperature less than 100 degrees Fahrenheit) without fever-reducing medication. If symptoms worsen, call your doctor.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/index.html>

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