



INFLUENZA CARE

What is INFLUENZA (the flu)?

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. There are three types of influenza viruses: type A, type B and type C. Influenza A has many different subtypes such as H1N1 or H3N2. Influenza occurs throughout the year, but seasonally peaks from December to March during which outbreaks of Influenza A and/or B occur. Unlike Influenza A and B that can cause moderate to severe illness, Influenza C causes only mild illness and is not thought to cause epidemics.

What are flu symptoms?

Flu symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, extreme fatigue, sore throat, runny nose, stuffy nose, and a cough. At times, intestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain are present. Flu may worsen previously existing medical conditions or cause severe illness such as pneumonia or respiratory failure, which can lead to death.

What does a person do if they have the flu?

Basic treatment includes bed rest, fluids, and over-the-counter medications to relieve symptoms of a runny or stuffy nose, cough, sore throat, fever, and discomfort. Drink plenty of non-caffeinated, clear liquids like chicken noodle soup and decaffeinated hot tea.

Do not use aspirin for infants, children, or teenagers suspected of having the flu because of the associated risk for developing Reye Syndrome.

Antiviral medications reduce the severity and shorten the duration of illness from influenza. They work best when administered within 48 hours of illness onset but can still be helpful if administered after the 48-hour mark. In bad flu seasons like the 2014-15 season, it becomes even more important to contact your doctor early if you think you may have the flu. Your doctor will decide if you need antivirals. This is particularly important for those who are elderly, very young, and who have underlying heart or lung conditions or an immuno-compromising illness, including diabetes.

People with the flu should stay home from work, school, and other gatherings to prevent sickening others. Do not return to work or school until at least 24 hours after being free of fever (100° F or 37.8° C) and other signs of illness without the use of fever-reducing medications.

When should the sick seek urgent medical care?

Children need emergency medical care when they have trouble breathing, or breathe faster; when their skin turns a bluish color; and when they do not drink enough liquids. Other warning signs are not waking up or interacting; not wanting to be held; flu-like symptoms that improve but return with a fever and worse cough; and a fever with a rash.

Adults need urgent emergency medical care when they have difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, and when they have pain or pressure in their chest or abdomen. Other warning signs are sudden dizziness, confusion, and severe or persistent vomiting.

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Frequently Asked Questions

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread from person-to-person by direct contact with airborne particles or large droplets from the respiratory tract of the infected person when the person coughs, sneezes, or talks. Transmission can also occur by handling articles recently contaminated by secretions from the nose and throat of the infected person. Hand washing and avoiding or limiting contact with an infected person help reduce the risk of infection.

How long can ill people spread influenza?

People with influenza can spread the infection before symptoms appear and may be contagious for more than seven days when they are sick.

How is influenza prevented?

Take these steps to protect yourself from contracting influenza and spreading it to others:

- Get your flu shot.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners (containing at least 60% alcohol) are effective when soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty.
- Avoid close contact with sick people. Ill persons should wear a facemask, if possible, when within six feet of others. Designate a single household member as the caregiver to minimize interactions with persons who are not ill.
- Stay home from work or school if you are sick, and limit contact with others. People infected with influenza or ill with any influenza-like illness should remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F or 37.8° C), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications. This recommendation does not apply to health care settings where the exclusion period is seven days from symptom onset, or until symptoms are resolved.
- If people with flu-like illness must go into the community, they should wear a facemask to reduce the risk of spreading the virus when coughing, sneezing, talking, or breathing. If a facemask is unavailable, use a handkerchief or tissue to cover any coughing. Properly dispose tissues after use.

References and Sources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.flu.gov
- Delaware Division of Public Health: www.flu.delaware.gov

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