



INFLUENZA (Flu)

What is INFLUENZA (Flu)?

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. There are two main types of influenza viruses: type A and type B. Each type has many different subtypes or strains. The flu can cause mild to severe illness and, at times, can cause death. Some people such as young children, older people and people with certain health conditions are at higher risk for serious flu complications. *The best way to prevent this illness is by getting a flu vaccination.*

Influenza can occur throughout the year, but seasonally peaks from December to March. Each year in the United States, on average:

- 5 percent to 20 percent of the population get the flu;
- More than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications; and
- About 36,000 people die from the flu.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, extreme fatigue, sore throat, runny nose, cough and nasal congestion. Occasionally, stomach symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain are present.

What are complications associated with flu?

Complications caused by influenza include pneumonia, dehydration, diabetes; and worsening of chronic medical conditions such as chronic lung or heart diseases. Children may develop sinus problems or ear infections.

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 coughing, sneezing, or talking. Transmission can also occur through articles recently contaminated by secretions from the nose and throat of the infected person. Handwashing and avoiding or limiting contact with an infected person may reduce the risk of infection.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of influenza usually appear 1-4 days after exposure.



Frequently Asked Questions

How long can a person spread influenza?

Persons are most contagious during the 24 hours before symptoms appear and may be contagious for up to 5 -7 days after getting sick. This means that you can give someone the flu before you know you are sick, as well as when you are sick.

How is influenza diagnosed?

The diagnosis of influenza is usually based on symptoms. For a laboratory-confirmed diagnosis, the virus is detected in specimens collected from the throat or nose by culture or a rapid test. Laboratory testing is generally reserved for hospitalized individuals or those at high risk for complications related to influenza.

What is the treatment of influenza?

Basic treatment includes bed rest, fluids and over-the-counter medications for the relief of symptoms of runny nose, cough, sore throat, fever and discomfort. Aspirin should not be used for infants, children or teenagers because of the associated risk for contracting Reye Syndrome.

Antiviral medications may reduce the severity and shorten the duration of influenza type A in healthy adults when administered within 48 hours of illness onset. These drugs may have side effects and must be ordered by a physician. Antiviral medications are generally reserved for hospitalized individuals or those at high risk for complications related to influenza.

Can influenza be prevented?

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each fall. Influenza vaccine is updated annually to match the circulating strain of influenza and provides protection for approximately one year. If unable to get the vaccine in the fall, the vaccine can still be taken anytime during the flu season. It takes about one to two weeks for the antibody to develop and provide protection.

For detailed information regarding prevention of seasonal influenza with vaccination:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/>