

The family library

About Influenza (flu)



What is Influenza (flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu **vaccine** each year.

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by 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 also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or possibly their nose.

What are the symptoms of Influenza?

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills (Note: not everyone with flu will have a fever)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

About Influenza (cont.)



Period of contagiousness

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

Flu is unpredictable; however, certain people are at greater risk for serious complications if they get the flu. This includes older people, young children, pregnant women and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), and persons who live in facilities like nursing homes.

Prevention

The **single best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated** each year, and this is especially important for the elderly and others who are in the high risk group. Families can help prevent the spread of influenza by practicing good health habits like covering your cough and washing your hands often to help stop the spread of germs and prevent respiratory illnesses like the flu. There also are flu antiviral drugs that can be used to treat and prevent the flu.

1. Avoid close contact.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

2. Stay home when you are sick.

If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others who are most vulnerable from catching your illness.

3. Cover your mouth and nose.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.

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Prevention (cont.)

4. Clean your hands.

Washing your hands often will help protect you and others from germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

6. Practice other good health habits.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

For more information about Influenza from the National Institutes of Health, click [HERE](#).

For more information about Influenza from CDC, click [HERE](#).