

INFLUENZA (Flu) FACT SHEET

What is influenza or the flu?

Influenza (flu) is a highly contagious viral illness that infects the nose, throat, and lungs. It is more severe than other similar illnesses, such as the common cold. Because the flu changes every year, a new vaccine is created for each flu season. Getting an annual flu vaccination is vital for prevention. Flu season lasts from October through March with December through February as peak months.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Sudden onset of symptoms
- Fever/chills (in most cases)
- Aches
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sore throat
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Diarrhea & vomiting are common in children

Symptoms appear usually 1 to 4 days after exposure and typically last 1-2 weeks.

How can it be prevented?

- **Get vaccinated every year! Vaccination is the best way to prevent the flu.**
- Wash hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or a sleeve.
- Avoid those who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Germs spread this way.

How is it spread?

Flu is HIGHLY contagious between people.

- It is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes and the droplets land in your nose or mouth.
- It is spread when you touch something with droplets on it and then touch your mouth or nose.

A person is contagious from 1 day before symptoms appear through 5-7 days after they disappear.

How is it treated?

- With prescription antiviral medications that can lessen symptoms and shorten the illness by 1 to 2 days
- By drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration

Do not return to work, school or daycare until cleared by a health care provider.

The flu may cause complications such as bacterial pneumonia, severe dehydration, or worsening of existing chronic conditions (heart disease, asthma). Contact your healthcare provider with any concerns.

More information: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>

This FACT SHEET is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a healthcare provider. For more information call your healthcare provider.

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