



Fact Sheet: Influenza

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 health care provider. For more information, contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.

What is influenza (flu) disease?

Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness. There are 3 types of influenza viruses (A, B, and C) that have been recognized to cause illness in humans. Influenza A and B viruses cause seasonal epidemics of disease almost every fall and winter. The emergence of new and different strains of Influenza A virus such as H1N1 and H3N2 can infect people and cause disease.

How is the flu transmitted?

- Droplets that are spread through the air from coughing and sneezing by an infected person
- Direct contact with an infected person.
- Being in crowded populations or enclosed spaces, such as in schools or on buses
- By touching objects with flu viruses on them and then touching face, eyes, nose or mouth

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms usually appear within 1 to 4 days after being infected and can include:

- Fever or feeling feverish
- Chills
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Body or muscle aches
- It is common for children to have vomiting and diarrhea

These symptoms can be severe and may require a person to stay in bed for several days, go to the hospital, or be fatal and cause death.

How is the flu different from a cold?

Colds and the flu are both respiratory illnesses with similar symptoms but are caused by different viruses. In general, the flu is worse than a cold and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense. Symptoms onsets are often more sudden. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose with a gradual onset of symptoms and rarely a fever.

How is flu treated?

- Get plenty of rest
- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration (i.e., water, juice, or tea)
- Take non-aspirin medication for fever and body aches
- See a healthcare provider to receive antiviral medication such as Tamiflu to help decrease symptoms (if taken soon after getting ill)

How can the flu be prevented?

Vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza. It is recommended every year for anyone 6 months and older. The vaccine protects against 3 or 4 strains of the influenza virus.

Sometimes, an unpredicted new strain may appear after the vaccine has been distributed. If someone becomes infected with a new strain of influenza, the vaccine will not be effective but can still provide some protection and lessen symptoms.

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Additional prevention measures:

- Wash hands frequently, especially after coughing, sneezing and handling used tissues
- Avoid close contact with those who have cold or flu-like symptoms
- After contact with a person who is ill, wash hands and keep fingers away from eyes, nose, and mouth
- People could “boost” their immune systems by eating a healthy diet, by getting regular physical activity and plenty of rest
- Do not share anything that goes into the mouth (drinking cups and straws) with other people
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (doorknobs, refrigerator handles, phone, and water faucets) often if someone in the house has a cold or the flu

Do children need to stay home from school?

Yes. A child with the flu should be kept home from daycare or school until their symptoms have resolved and clearance have been given by their healthcare provider.