



## Health Fact Sheet : INFLUENZA

### What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly known as "the flu," is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract. It affects all age groups, though kids tend to get it more often than adults.

### How does influenza spread?

Flu is easily spread from person to person both directly and indirectly. The influenza virus can spread to other people in droplets contaminated with the virus. Produced by coughing, sneezing, or even talking, these droplets land near or in the mouth or the nose of uninfected people, and the disease may spread to them. The disease can spread indirectly to others if contaminated droplets land on utensils, dishes, clothing, or almost any surface and then are touched by uninfected people. If the infected person touches their nose or mouth, for example, they transfer or spread the disease to themselves or others. The incubation time for influenza ranges from one to five days, but the average is two days.

### What are flu (influenza) symptoms?

Typical clinical features of influenza may include

- fever in adults and often even higher in children, sometimes with facial flushing and/or sweating)
- chills,
- respiratory symptoms such as cough (more often in adults), sore throat (more often in adults), runny or stuffy nose (especially in children),
- headache,
- muscle aches,
- fatigue, sometimes extreme.

Although appetite loss, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea can sometimes accompany influenza infection, especially in children, gastrointestinal symptoms are rarely prominent.

### How long is the flu contagious, and how long does the flu last?

The flu is typically contagious about 24-48 hours before symptoms appear (from about the last day of the incubation period) and in normal healthy adults is contagious for another five to seven days. Children are usually contagious for a little while longer (about seven to 10 days). Individuals with severe infections may be contagious as long as symptoms last (about seven to 14 days). In adults, flu symptoms usually last about five to seven days, but in children, the symptoms may last longer (about seven to 10 days). However, some symptoms such as weakness and fatigue may gradually wane over several weeks.



## How is the flu (influenza) diagnosed?

The flu is presumptively diagnosed clinically by the patient's history of association with people known to have the disease and their symptoms listed above. Usually, a quick test (for example, nasopharyngeal swab sample) is done to see if the patient is infected with influenza A or B virus.

## What is the key to flu (influenza) prevention?

### 1. Flu vaccine

Influenza can be prevented by annual influenza vaccination. The CDC's current Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) issued recommendations for everyone 6 months of age and older, who do not have any contraindications to vaccination, to receive a flu vaccine each year.

### 2. Controlling the spread of infection

It is important to take measures such as these to reduce the spread of infection:

- **Wash your hands.** Thorough and frequent hand-washing is an effective way to prevent many common infections. Or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers if soap and water aren't readily available.
- **Contain your coughs and sneezes.** Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough. To avoid contaminating your hands, cough or sneeze into a tissue or into the inner crook of your elbow.
- **Avoid crowds.** Flu spreads easily wherever people congregate — in child care centers, schools, office buildings, auditoriums and public transportation. By avoiding crowds during peak flu season, you reduce your chances of infection. And, if you're sick, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever subsides so that you lessen your chance of infecting others.

## What are some flu treatments an individual can do at home (home remedies)?

- Increasing liquid intake, warm showers, warm compresses, especially in the nasal area, can reduce the body aches and reduce nasal congestion.
- Nasal strips and humidifiers may help reduce congestion, especially while trying to sleep.
- Some physicians recommend nasal irrigation with saline to further reduce congestion; some recommend nonprescription decongestants.
- Fever can be treated with over-the-counter acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin and others); read labels for safe dosage.
- Cough can be suppressed by cough drops and over-the-counter cough syrup.
- Notify a doctor if an individual's symptoms at home get worse.



### What can people eat when they have the flu?

While a person has the flu, good nutrition can help the recovery process. Anyone with the flu needs to avoid dehydration, soothe sore throat and/or upset stomach, and have a good protein intake.

- Dehydration can be avoided by adequate fluid intake such as juices (orange, cranberry, grapefruit, tomato, grape, and others).
- Sore throat and upset stomach may be relieved by broths or warm soups (chicken, vegetable, or beef) and plain crackers, toast, and ginger tea or noncarbonated ginger ale. Scrambled eggs, yogurt, and/or protein drinks are good protein sources.
- In addition, bananas, rice, and applesauce are food that are often recommended for those with an upset stomach. This list is not exhaustive but should provide a balanced approach to help speed recovery from the flu.

### When should a person go to the emergency department for the flu?

Need to seek emergency medical care for a **sick child** with any of these symptoms or signs:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing (shortness of breath).
- Bluish or gray skin color.
- Not drinking enough fluids.
- Severe or persistent vomiting.
- Not waking up or not interacting.
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held.
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with high fever and cough.