

FACT SHEET

Influenza

What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly called 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 affects people of all ages. Serious outcomes of flu can cause hospitalization or death. Older people, young children, and people with certain underlying health conditions are at a higher risk of serious complications.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread from person to person by inhaling respiratory droplets from infected people that are coughing or sneezing. People with flu can spread it to others up to 6 feet away. Flu can also be spread indirectly by touching things contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Vomiting and diarrhea

How can influenza be prevented?

Everyone 6 months and older should get a yearly flu vaccine, especially if they are at higher risk for complications. High risk groups include adults 65 and older, children younger than 2 years, and people with chronic health conditions. Avoid close contact with sick people. Stay home when you are sick and limit your contact with others. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Wash your hands often with soap and water. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Clean and disinfect surfaces that may have been contaminated with flu virus germs.

How is influenza treated?

Stay at home, rest, and drink lots of fluids. There are prescription medications called anti-viral drugs that can be used to treat flu illness if taken early enough.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended 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.