

INFLUENZA

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Influenza?

Influenza, commonly called the “flu”, is a highly infectious viral disease of the respiratory tract. Persons of any age can get influenza. Most people are ill with influenza for only a few days. However, the very young and elderly and those with chronic illnesses can develop serious complications as a result of influenza, and require hospitalization. Influenza also causes thousands of deaths each year, mostly among the elderly.

How is it spread?

Influenza is spread from person to person by direct contact with respiratory droplets through coughing and sneezing. It may also be spread indirectly by articles contaminated with respiratory secretions. The flu virus enters the body through mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth. The incubation period is usually 2 days but can vary from 1-4 days. The most frequent complication of influenza is pneumonia.

How is it treated?

Control of fever with acetaminophen or other antipyretic, adequate rest, and drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration are some measures used to alleviate flu symptoms. Antiviral therapy may be prescribed by a physician for immunocompromised persons or those with chronic conditions that might predispose them to a severe or complicated influenza infection. Children or teenagers with influenza should not receive salicylates (such as aspirin) because of the resulting risk of developing Reye syndrome.

How is it prevented?

There are two types of influenza vaccine available in the U.S. Trivalent inactivated vaccine is made from three types of killed influenza viruses each season and is given by injection. Since influenza viruses can change often, the vaccine is updated yearly. Live attenuated vaccine is also available for healthy persons from 2-49 years of age and is administered by the intranasal route. Protection develops 1 to 2 weeks after the vaccine is received and may last up to one year. Plan to get influenza vaccine between October and December each year.

SYMPTOMS OF INFLUENZA

- Sudden onset of fever (100-103°F in adults and often higher in children)
- Chills
- Sore Throat
- Headache
- Generalized muscle aches
- Dry cough
- Sensitivity to light
- Extreme fatigue
- Children may also experience nausea, vomiting and diarrhea along with respiratory symptoms

Additional prevention measures include: good handwashing, especially after coughing, sneezing and handling tissues.

Avoid close contact with those who have cold or flu-like symptoms.

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