



Influenza

What is influenza?

Influenza (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 at times can lead to death.

How does influenza spread?

Influenza is spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get the influenza by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or possibly their nose.

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on influenza to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Children, especially younger children, might transmit the virus for longer periods.

What signs should I watch for?

Influenza signs include fever, cough, shortness of breath, headache, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, weakness and tiredness. It is important to note that not everyone with influenza will have a fever. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults. The elderly, young children and people with chronic illnesses are at greater risk of more severe complications.

How do I protect myself and others?

The flu shot is the best way to protect yourself, your family and those you care for. It has been shown to reduce the number of doctor visits, hospitalizations and deaths related to influenza.

- Get the flu shot early and every year
- Wash your hands often
- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze
- Try not to touch your face
- Stay at home when you're sick
- Clean and disinfect common surfaces and items

For more information on the flu shot see the SMDHU fact sheets on [adult](#) and [child](#) influenza vaccines.

How is influenza diagnosed?

It is very difficult to tell the difference between the flu and other viral or bacterial illnesses based on the symptoms alone. Influenza is diagnosed by a swab in the back of your nose. Only health care providers can do the swab.

What is the difference between the common cold and influenza?

SYMPTOM	COLD	INFLUENZA
Fever	Rare	Common, high (39C (102F)) Starts suddenly, lasts 3 – 4 days. Doesn't happen to everyone.
General aches and pains	Sometimes, mild	Common, often severe
Muscle pain	Sometimes, mild	Common, often severe
Tiredness and weakness	Sometimes, mild	Common, starts early and can last 2 – 3 weeks
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort	Sometimes, mild to moderate	Common, can be severe
Complications	Can lead to sinus congestion or earache	Can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure, can worsen a current chronic condition, can be life threatening

For information call Infectious Diseases: ext. 8809
or Immunization Program ext. 8806.



Tel: 721-7520
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Your Health Connection

What is the treatment for influenza?

Antiviral medication can be taken to fight against Influenza. You can only get them as a prescription from your health care provider or a local pharmacist.

What if I have influenza?

- Stay home when sick and get plenty of rest
- Drink lots of fluids
- Avoid drinks with caffeine
- Take basic pain or fever relievers but do not give acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin®) to children or teenagers under the age of 18
- Treat muscle pain using a hot water bottle or heating pad — apply heat for short periods of time
- Take a warm bath
- Gargle with a glass of warm salt water or suck on hard candy or lozenges
- Use spray or saline drops for a stuffy nose
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco

If you or someone you care for is at a higher risk for complications from influenza, call your doctor or nurse practitioner if:

- you don't start to feel better after a few days
- your symptoms get worse
- you develop flu symptoms are and considered at higher risk for influenza complications:
 - seniors (people 65+ years)
 - children under five years old
 - pregnant women
 - people with underlying health conditions
 - Indigenous peoples