

INFLUENZA

(Flu)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A contagious infection caused by viruses that affect the nose, throat, and lungs. Influenza (flu) outbreaks occur in the late fall and winter with varying degrees of severity. The disease spreads through communities creating an epidemic. Influenza affects both sexes and all ages.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Chills and moderate-to-high fever.
- Headache.
- Muscle aches, including backache.
- Dry cough.
- Sore throat.
- Runny or stuffy nose.
- Fatigue.

CAUSES

The virus germs are spread when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or speaks. The germs get into the air, and nearby persons breathe in the germs. Flu can also be spread by touching a surface that has the germs on it and then touching your nose or mouth. Adults are contagious 1 day before symptoms and up to 7 days after getting sick. Children may be contagious for longer than 7 days. Symptoms start 1 to 5 days after exposure.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Crowded places during an epidemic.
- Students in schools.
- Children and the elderly.
- Nursing homes or long-term care centers.
- Recent illness that has lowered resistance.
- Smokers.
- Chronic illness, such as chronic lung or heart disease.
- Weak immune system due to illness or drugs.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Have a yearly influenza vaccine injection or a nasal spray flu vaccine. A different vaccine is made every year because strains of the virus change from year to year. Sometimes, an unpredicted new strain appears and you may still get the flu, but it is usually a milder case. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions.
- Some antiviral drugs may also help in preventing flu.
- Wash hands often to prevent the spread of any germs.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Most people who get the flu get better in a week. A cough or tired feeling may last a little longer. Elderly persons, children 6 months to 23 months, pregnant women, and people with chronic illnesses are more at risk for complications.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Pneumonia, dehydration, or worsening of a chronic illness. Children may get sinus problems or ear infections.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Most people who get the flu will use self-care methods at home. See your health care provider if symptoms are more severe, cause any concern, or you are at risk for complications.
- Your health care provider may do a physical exam. A diagnosis of flu can usually be made based on the symptoms. Medical tests are not always needed, but may be done to verify the diagnosis or check for complications.
- Treatment steps may include extra rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and using flu remedies or other drugs.
- To relieve nasal congestion, use salt-water drops (one-quarter teaspoon of salt in four ounces of water).
- To relieve a sore throat, gargle often with warm or cold double-strength tea or salt water (mix one-half teaspoon of salt in one cup of water).
- Use a cool-mist humidifier (if advised) to increase air moisture. Clean humidifier daily.
- Avoid spreading germs. Wash your hands often.
- Use a warm heating pad for aching muscles.

MEDICATIONS

- For minor discomfort, use nonprescription drugs, such as acetaminophen, aspirin, cough syrups, nasal sprays, or decongestants. Do not give aspirin to children under age 18.
- Antiviral drugs may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

Get extra rest. Rest helps your body fight the virus.

DIET

You may just want liquids at first. Then progress to small meals of bland starchy foods (e.g., dry toast, rice, pudding, cooked cereal, baked potatoes).



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of influenza that seem more severe or cause concern.
- Symptoms get worse, such as higher fever, shaking chills, chest pain with breathing, coughing that produces a yellow mucus, ear ache, sinus pain, neck pain or stiffness, nausea, or vomiting.

Special notes:

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