



Fact Sheet: Influenza

What is Influenza?

It is a contagious virus that infects the respiratory tract, and is commonly called “the flu”. Compared with most other viral respiratory infections, such as the common cold, influenza infection often causes a more severe illness.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear within 2 to 4 days after being infected and include:

- Fever (usually 100.5 F to 103.5 F in adults and often even higher in children) or feeling feverish/chills*
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- Extreme fatigue (very tired)

**Not everyone with flu will have a fever*

Most people who get the flu recover completely in 1 to 2 weeks, but some people develop serious and potentially life threatening medical complications, such as pneumonia. Flu-related complications can occur at any age; however, the elderly, people with chronic health problems, and young children are much more likely to develop serious complications after influenza infection.

How is it spread?

Viruses that cause flu are spread by direct contact with respiratory droplets (i.e., coughing and sneezing). Flu viruses enter the body through the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth.

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days **after** becoming sick.

What is the treatment?

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration (i.e., water, juice, and tea).
- Take non-aspirin medication for fever and body aches.
- Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them
- Contact your health care provider if symptoms are severe

How is it prevented?

The best way to prevent influenza is to be vaccinated against it. About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection.

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the three influenza viruses that research suggests will be most common. The 2010-2011 flu vaccine will protect against 2009 H1N1, and two other influenza viruses (an H3N2 virus and an influenza B virus).

Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine each year starting with the 2010-2011 influenza season. It is especially important that certain people get vaccinated either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for people at high risk for developing flu-related complications.

Additional prevention measures:

- Wash hands frequently, especially after coughing, sneezing and handling used tissues.
- Avoid close contact with those who have cold or flu-like symptoms.
- After contact with a person who is ill, wash your hands and keep your fingers away from your eyes, nose, and mouth to prevent the spread of the virus

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self -diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or 257-3612.

Visit our website at: www.gchd.us or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov

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