



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Influenza (flu) is a contagious infection caused by a virus that affects the nose, throat, and lungs. The two main flu virus types are called A and B. Each type has different strains that tend to change each year. Flu outbreaks occur in the late fall and winter with varying degrees of severity. An outbreak may be epidemic (occurs in a set geographic area) or pandemic (occurs worldwide). Flu affects all ages.

FREQUENT SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Moderate-to-high fever and chills.
- Headache; joint and muscle aches (e.g., backache).
- Sore throat; dry cough; nose may be runny or stuffy.
- Skin may feel warm or hot.
- Fatigue and weakness; possibly vomiting or diarrhea.

CAUSES

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

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Schools and day care centers.
- Infants, children, elderly, and pregnant women.
- Nursing homes or long-term care centers.
- Having chronic heart or lung disease, or diabetes.
- Weak immune system due to illness or drugs.
- Health care workers.

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.
- Some antiviral drugs may also help in preventing flu.
- Wash hands often to prevent the spread of germs or use alcohol-based hand cleaner. Avoid crowds. Get medical advice about the use of a facemask/respirator.
- Follow guidelines set by public health officials.

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, young children, pregnant women, and people with chronic illness are more at risk for complications.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Pneumonia, kidney failure, swelling of the brain, and death. In children, sinus problems or ear infections.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Call your health care provider about your symptoms and if you need to be seen at an office visit. Many people who get the flu can use self-care methods at home.
- 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 flu type or check for complications.
- Treatment steps include getting extra rest, drinking plenty of fluids, flu remedies, or prescribed drugs.
- Avoid spreading germs. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough. Use a tissue and then throw it into the trash. Avoid close contact with others if possible. All household members should wash their hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Don't smoke. Avoid second-hand smoke.
- To learn more: CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention); (800) 232-4636; website: www.cdc.gov.

MEDICATIONS

- Use nonprescription drugs, such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, cough syrups, decongestants, or nasal sprays for specific symptoms. Do not give aspirin to children under age 18. Consult your health care provider about giving drugs to a child age 6 or younger.
- Antiviral drugs may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

Get extra rest. Wait 7 days after symptoms begin (or 24 hours after symptoms clear up) before going back to work or school, or taking a trip.

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, or baked potatoes).



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of influenza. This is important if person is very young or elderly, has a chronic medical condition, or is pregnant.
- Symptoms don't improve, get worse, or new symptoms develop.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page ☐