

Influenza

What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious disease caused by the influenza virus. The two main types of influenza virus are influenza A and influenza B. Within each type are different subtypes, such as influenza A(H3N2). The amount of types and subtypes can change year to year.

How common is influenza?

Most often, influenza occurs during the fall and winter months. The number of people with flu varies year to year.

How do people become infected?

Influenza is spread from person to person through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person during coughing and sneezing.

What are the signs and symptoms of influenza?

Influenza symptoms include headache, fever (greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit), tiredness (can be extreme), dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion (runny or stuffy nose), and body aches. Vomiting and diarrhea are uncommon.

How long can you spread influenza?

After exposure, symptoms appear in one to three days. Influenza is normally contagious one day before and for up to one week after symptoms appear.

Who is at risk for influenza?

Anyone can get influenza but people age 65 and older, people with long-term medical conditions, pregnant women, and young children are more likely to have complications from influenza.

How is influenza treated?

Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics won't work. There are antiviral medications doctors may prescribe to decrease the duration of symptoms. These medications should be given as soon as possible after symptoms appear.

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How can you prevent influenza?

The best way to prevent influenza is to be vaccinated. Everyone six months of age or older should receive a vaccination each year because influenza strains vary year to year. Those who receive annual vaccinations tend to have milder illness and are less likely to be hospitalized from complications.

- Other ways to prevent influenza are:
- Wash hands with soap and water often.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow, not your hands.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Stay home when you are sick to avoid spreading the virus.

What should you do if you get influenza?

If you are experiencing cold or flu symptoms that you believe require medical attention, contact your healthcare provider. Rest, drink plenty of liquids, avoid using alcohol or tobacco, and use aspirin or acetaminophen to reduce fever. Due to the risk of Reye's syndrome, aspirin and other medications containing salicylate should not be given to children.

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.html>