

Influenza

Also known as: The Flu

What is Influenza?

The 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. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

Spread of Disease



Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or possibly their nose.

Flu may be passed to others even before a person knows they are sick as well as when they are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

Signs and Symptoms

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms.

- Fever (note: not everyone will have a fever)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Some people may have vomiting or diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

Diagnosis

A health care provider may diagnose influenza based on symptoms and clinical judgement or they may choose to use an influenza laboratory test. Influenza testing may be helpful during an outbreak or for people who are pregnant or have a weakened immune system.

Treatment or Complications

Most people with the flu have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. Rest, liquids and staying home and avoiding contact with others are the main treatments for the flu. Healthcare providers will determine if testing and treatment are needed. Antiviral drugs may be prescribed. The drugs work best the sooner they are started.

Complications from influenza can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

In children, emergency warning signs that require urgent medical treatment are: fast breathing or trouble breathing, bluish skin color, not drinking enough fluids, not waking up or interacting, being so irritable that the child does not want to be held, fever with a rash, or flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent attention include, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness or confusion, and severe or persistent vomiting.

A person should seek medical care immediately if experiencing any of these signs. Upon arrival, the reception staff should be notified of flu symptoms. Persons may be asked to wear a mask and/ or sit in a separate area to protect others from getting sick.

People at Risk

Anyone can get influenza, but the risk of complications is highest in these groups:

- Persons age 65 years and older
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- Adults and children with long-lasting disorders of the lungs or heart, including children with asthma
- Adults and children with diabetes, kidney disease, or weakened immune systems
- Pregnant women
- Health-care workers, household members, and others who are in contact with persons at high risk for influenza-related complications.



Prevention

The best way to prevent influenza is to get **yearly** flu vaccinations. Viruses change over time and each year the vaccine is updated to include the ones that are most likely to circulate in the upcoming flu season. Therefore, people who need to be protected against influenza should get a flu shot every year.

Following these steps may also prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses like the flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Wash your hands often with soap or water
- Stay away as much as you can from people who are sick
- Stay home from work or school if sick
- Try not to touch eyes, nose, or mouth



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES www.michigan.gov/mdhhs

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov