

Flu (Influenza) Facts

What is the flu (influenza)? Influenza is a virus. There are three types of influenza viruses (A, B, and C). Influenza types A and B cause respiratory illnesses.

What are the symptoms and how soon do they occur after exposure to an ill person?

Illness will usually begin very suddenly 1-5 days after exposure and commonly lasts for 2-7 days. Symptoms usually include fever, cough, headache, muscle aches, and fatigue.

When does influenza occur? Influenza occurs in the late fall and winter in the United States.

Who can get influenza? Anyone. Persons at highest risk for severe illness are the elderly, the very young, pregnant women, and those with chronic medical problems such as heart or lung conditions, diabetes, or trouble with their immune system.

How is influenza spread? Influenza is spread by air droplets from an ill person to other people generally by coughing and sneezing.

Can you get influenza from domestic pets and animals? Animals such as pigs, horses, and birds can become ill with their own influenza viruses. Pigs have spread their influenza viruses (known as "swine flu") to people.

Is there a treatment for influenza? Persons with influenza should rest and drink lots of fluids. Early treatment with antiviral medications may be helpful. This is not a replacement for the influenza vaccine.

Can you get influenza more than once? Yes. More than one type of influenza can go around each winter so people can get the flu more than once a year. People will usually get influenza many times in their life.

Is there a vaccine for influenza? Yes. Different strains of influenza circulate at different times. A new vaccine is issued each flu season. People who need the vaccine should be vaccinated every year. People who are at risk for getting a serious case of influenza or a complication should get the vaccine. The vaccine may not prevent someone from getting the flu, but it can lessen the severity of symptoms. It takes about 2 weeks to build up antibodies after receiving the vaccine.

How can you prevent the spread of influenza? Persons who are ill with fever and cough should stay home. They should not go to school or work. They could easily spread the disease to other people. People should cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. A safe and effective vaccine is available, especially for persons at high risk (listed above) or anyone wishing to avoid influenza. Because the virus may change slightly from year to year the vaccine is changed each year and should be received each influenza season.

Flu Prevention, *From Pennsylvania's Secretary of Health, Calvin B. Johnson, M.D., M.P.H.*

- **Wash your hands thoroughly** with soap and warm water before and following food preparation, before eating and after using restrooms or changing diapers.
- Be careful what you touch. Hands transmit germs.
- Cover your nose and mouth with hands or tissues when coughing or sneezing. Wash hands afterward to prevent spreading germs to doorknobs and other items. Discard tissues right way.
- Get plenty of rest, eat properly, and dress appropriately for the weather.
- When ill, prevent the spread of germs by staying home from school or the workplace, if possible.
- During flu season, minimize time in crowded areas, such as shopping centers, and avoid contact with those at high risk for the flu, such as the elderly and those with chronic illness.
- If over the age of 65, pregnant, or if you have a chronic illness or disease, talk with your doctor about a flu and pneumonia vaccination.

Information from the Pennsylvania Department of Health website at www.health.state.pa.us

Flu: Recommendations for the Home

- Any family member suspected of having the flu should not attend work, school or daycare. Ill family members should be encouraged to rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- **Wash hands frequently** by using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC's). Dry hands with a disposable towel if possible. Towels should be changed frequently. Young children should be instructed and assisted to make sure they wash their hands properly. Bathrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and towels are available for your family's use.
- Flu can be spread by coughs or sneezes. Family members should cover their mouths when coughing and use a disposable tissue when sneezing or blowing their noses. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and then hands should be washed. (If you cannot wash hands, rub hands with an alcohol hand gel). Make sure tissues are available in the home and cars for runny noses and sneezing.
- Encourage all members of your household, especially those with medical conditions and children between 6 and 23 months of age, to get a flu shot. It is never too late to be vaccinated.
- Spread of the flu in homes is likely. Families should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, toothbrushes, etc.
- Clean surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, kitchen table, etc., frequently with a household disinfectant or bleach solution. (Mixing ¼ cup bleach with 1 gallon of water makes a bleach solution). If disinfectant is not available hot water and soap can be used.
- When caring for a family member who is ill, hands should be washed immediately after helping them.
- If family members get the flu, especially if they are elderly or have other medical problems, it is recommended that you to contact their physicians immediately. Their doctors may give antiviral drugs, which may decrease the spread and severity of the diseases. However, taking these drugs does not mean you do not need to get the flu shot.

Flu: Recommendations for Business

- Encourage all workers, especially those with medical conditions, to get the flu shot. A flu shot greatly reduces the chance of getting the flu and decreases the chance of being seriously ill, thus reducing absenteeism. It is never too late to get the flu shot; however, the sooner the better.
- Employees with symptoms of the flu should not come to work. Excluding ill employees from the work place can help reduce the spread of the illness to other employees.
- People often catch influenza and other viruses by picking up the virus on their hands, and then touching their nose, eyes, or mouth. **Wash hands several times** a day, using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC song). Dry hands with paper towels or automatic hand dryers. Restrooms should be checked regularly to ensure that soap and paper towels are available for employee use.
- Influenza is often spread by coughs and sneezes. Make sure disposable tissues are available in work areas for runny noses and sneezing. Individuals should always cover their mouths when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their nose. Tissues should be thrown away immediately, and then hands should be washed. (If you cannot wash hands, rub hands with an alcohol hand gel).
- Employees should be encouraged to contact their physician when they become ill during flu season.
- Employees should avoid sharing of saliva by not sharing glasses, forks, spoons, etc.
- Common use surfaces, such as water fountains, door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, desks, etc., should be cleaned periodically with disinfectants. Commercial disinfectants or bleach solutions are appropriate. (Mixing ¼ cup bleach with 1 gallon of water makes bleach solution).