



# Influenza

## What is Influenza?

Influenza, commonly called the “flu”, is a highly contagious viral disease of the respiratory tract. Persons of any age can get influenza. Most people are ill with influenza for only a few days. However, serious complications can develop as a result of Influenza, especially with the very young, elderly and people with chronic illnesses requiring hospitalization. Influenza also causes thousands of deaths each year.

## How is Influenza spread?

Influenza is spread from person to person by direct contact with respiratory droplets through coughing and sneezing. Influenza may also be spread indirectly by articles contaminated with respiratory secretions. The flu virus enters the body through mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth. Flu symptoms start 1-4 days (usually 2 days) after a person breathes in the virus. 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. The most frequent complication of influenza is pneumonia.

## How is Influenza prevented?

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine every season. The seasonal flu vaccine will protect against the influenza viruses that research suggests will be most common during the season. Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine every year. Since influenza viruses can change often, the vaccine is updated annually. Protection develops 1 to 2 weeks after the vaccine and lasts throughout the flu season. Plan to get your influenza vaccine as soon as it is available.

## How do I protect myself from getting sick with the flu?

- Get vaccinated when the vaccine becomes available, especially if you have a medical condition which makes complications from the flu more likely.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use alcohol based hand gel.

- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the inside of your elbow if you don't have a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- Use household cleaner containing bleach to clean surfaces that might get flu virus on them like door knobs, phones, faucets and toys.
- Stay home from work and school if you get sick with a flu-like illness and avoid contact with others so the virus does not spread. Stay at home until you have been free from fever for at least 24 hours after your last dose of fever reducing medication. Avoid close contact with those who have cold or flu-like symptoms.

## Symptoms of Influenza:

- Sudden onset of fever (100-103°F in adults and often higher in children)
- Chills
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Generalized muscle aches
- Dry cough
- Sensitivity to light
- Extreme tiredness
- Children may also experience nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea along with respiratory symptoms

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Source: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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