



Influenza (Flu)

Influenza, often called the flu, is a highly contagious viral disease. Flu viruses infect the nose, throat and lungs. The flu is the sixth leading cause of death among American adults. Each year, an average of 226,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 people die from the flu.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

The flu typically will last seven to 10 days and leaves a person feeling very weak and tired. Flu symptoms develop quickly with a sudden onset of:

- fever
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- dry cough
- sore throat
- muscle aches
- runny or stuffy nose

Children may also develop stomach symptoms (nausea, vomiting and diarrhea).

How is the flu spread?

The flu is spread when a person who has the virus sneezes or coughs into the air or onto a surface. When someone breathes in or touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth after touching an item contaminated with the virus, he or she may contract the flu.

Who is at risk for serious complications from the flu?

Anyone can get the flu, but some people are more likely to have flu-related complications, including: people age 65 and older, people of any age with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, COPD or heart disease), women who are pregnant and young children.

How can I avoid the flu?

- Get a flu shot every year.
- Wash your hands often with hot, soapy water. Use hand sanitizer when you cannot wash your hands.
- Cover a cough and sneeze into a tissue or the bend of your elbow. Do not cough or sneeze into your hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

What if I am already sick?

- Stay home from work or school.
- Contact your healthcare provider if your breathing is difficult or your fever or cough does not go away.
- Follow your healthcare provider's advice.

When should I contact my healthcare provider?

Contact your healthcare provider within 24 hours of experiencing flu-like symptoms. Your healthcare provider may prescribe an anti-viral medication that can help you feel better, shorten the time you are sick and prevent flu complications.