INFLUENZA

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The flu is different from a cold. The flu usually comes on suddenly. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue

Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults. It’s important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.

There are three types of influenza viruses: A, B and C. Human influenza A and B viruses cause seasonal epidemics of disease almost every winter in the United States. The emergence of a new and very different influenza virus to infect people can cause an influenza pandemic. Influenza type C infections cause a mild respiratory illness and are not thought to cause epidemics.

INSIDE SEVERITY

Flu is unpredictable and how severe it is can vary widely from one season to the next depending on many things, including:

- what flu viruses are spreading, how much flu vaccine is available, when vaccine is available, how many people get vaccinated, and how well the flu vaccine is matched to flu viruses that are causing illness.

Over a period of 30 years between 1976 and 2006, estimates of flu-associated deaths in the United States range from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people. During recent flu seasons, between 80% and 90% of flu related deaths have occurred in people 65 years and older.

IS THE FLU CONTAGIOUS

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems related to the flu can happen at any age, but some people are at high risk of developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect other people beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick.

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**IS THE FLU CONTAGIOUS (CONTINUED)**

Children may pass the virus for longer than 7 days. Symptoms start 1 to 4 days after the virus enters the body. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Some people can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons may still spread the virus to others.

**PERSON TO PERSON**

People with the flu can spread it to others up to about 6 feet away. Most experts think that flu viruses are 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 or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. 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 or nose.

To avoid this, people should stay away from sick people and stay home if sick. It also is important to wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub. Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick should not be shared without washing thoroughly first. Eating utensils can be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap and do not need to be cleaned separately. Further, frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at home, work and school, especially if someone is ill.

**VACCINATION**

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine.

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season. Traditional flu vaccines (called “trivalent” vaccines) are made to protect against three flu viruses; an influenza A (H1N1) virus, an influenza A (H3N2) virus, and an influenza B virus. There are also flu vaccines made to protect against four flu viruses (called “quadrivalent” vaccines). These vaccines protect against the same viruses as the trivalent vaccine and an additional B virus. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine every season.

**RESOURCES**

Health Service
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