

INFLUENZA (FLU) Information and Prevention

- **What is Influenza?**

Influenza, also called the flu, is a very common illness caused by the influenza virus. Most people who contract the flu are sick for approximately 1-2 weeks, but the flu can become serious and even deadly if you have a health condition such as: heart disease, asthma, diabetes, or have a weakened immune system.

The flu is very contagious. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that so far for the 2019-2020 flu season there have been at least 19 million flu illnesses, 210,000 hospitalizations, and 12,000 deaths from the flu. The CDC also reported that last week alone, there were 10 newly reported cases of pediatric (child) deaths associated with the flu bringing the current estimation for children related deaths to 78 thus far.

What are the symptoms of the Flu?

- You may have a fever
- Chills
- Tiredness (Fatigue)
- Headache
- Body aches
- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Post-nasal drip
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Decreased sense of smell
- You may have a metallic taste in your mouth
- Vomiting and diarrhea are common in children

- **How is the Flu spread?**

A person that has the flu coughs or sneezes out beads of moisture that contain the flu virus. These droplets in the air can travel up to 6 feet! You are exposed to the flu virus when you breathe the droplets in, or they land in your mouth, nose, or eyes. You also can become infected if you touch a place that those droplets land (like a desk, chair, counter, door knob) and then touch your face....allowing entry into your mouth, nose, or eyes. The flu virus can live on hard surfaces up to 72 hours!

A person infected with the flu virus can spread the virus 1 day before exhibiting symptoms of the flu until approximately 5-7 days later when all symptoms of the flu are gone.

- **How to protect yourself and prevent contracting the Flu?**

Get the Flu Shot

Experts say the single best way to avoid the flu is to get a flu vaccine as soon as you can. The ideal time is early fall because flu season in the United States is during the fall and winter months from October to March. BUT...Anytime during the season is fine if you have not already done so. When you get a flu vaccination, your body releases antibodies that can protect you from the most common virus strains.

You might still get other strains of the flu despite vaccination, although it's less likely to be severe, and you're less likely to develop pneumonia, be put on a ventilator, visit the intensive-care unit, or die from the flu after you've been vaccinated.

Stay At Least 3 Feet Away From Anyone Coughing or Sneezing

A person with the flu that is actively projecting droplets by coughing or sneezing can contaminate the air you breathe with the virus. Since it is not possible to decipher the difference between someone having a simple nose tickle, a cold, or the flu; it is best to keep your distance from anyone with suspicious symptoms.

Wash Your Hands

Whether you're in a public place or in your home, it's smart to wash your hands after handling any commonly-touched surfaces using soap and water afterward. CDC's best practices suggests proper hand washing technique includes the following: Use soap and lather up for at least 20 seconds, then rinse under water, and air dry or pat dry with a clean towel. Another tip is to then use your towel to open the door upon exiting public restrooms, thereby avoiding potentially contaminating your clean hands. In the absence of a sink, a hand sanitizer is your next best bet. It is a good idea to carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with you for those instances.

Think about it...did you touch a door handle? A faucet? A chair? A cash machine checking out your groceries? A restaurant table? A person who is showing symptoms of the flu..or who is infected but not exhibiting symptoms until tomorrow and is currently contagious? Practicing good hand hygiene is key to preventing the flu.

Keep Your Hands Away From Your Face – Especially Your Mouth, Nose, and Eyes

You risk getting sick when you touch an infected surface and transfer the virus to your face. The virus infects a person through mucosal membranes in your mouth, nose, or eyes. Therefore, between hand washing or hand sanitizing AVOID touching your face. If you need to cough or sneeze cover your mouth and nose with the inner aspect of you elbow. This prevents you from infecting yourself with whatever may be on your hands and also prevents you from possibly transferring your germs to others with your hands.

Clean Communal Surfaces At Least Once a Day

The flu virus can remain viable without a host for up to 72 hours. You may be living with someone who does not exhibit symptoms yet but who is still contagious. This is why you should wipe down commonly-touched surfaces in your home at least once a day using any standard household cleaner, regardless of whether anyone in your household is sick. Think about phone chargers, fridge handles, light switches, door knobs, and toilet handles, etc.

Refrain From Kissing Partners or Others Who Are Infected

The flu virus is carried in saliva, so kissing a flu carrier's mouth or face is risky during this time

Be Stingy, Do Not Share Certain Items

Try not to use the same pillows or towels as others in your home. Store your toothbrush out of sight versus a toothbrush holder with other's or in open air. A communal toothbrush holder contaminated by an infected person's toothbrush could transfer germs to your toothbrush, or an infected person's sneeze can contaminate your bristles with the flu virus, which can then be transferred to your mouth. It is also important to not share your food or eating utensils for the same rationale.

Quit Smoking

Evidence shows that smokers get the flu more often than people who do not smoke. When smokers get the flu they also tend to get a more severe infection and have a higher risk of dying from the flu. This is just one more reason to talk to your doctor about smoking cessation.

Take Care of Yourself

Self care and good health practices play a huge role in staying healthy enough to fight off the flu and other germs. Having **adequate sleep** is a good habit for optimal immune system functioning and to prevent respiratory viruses like the flu. The average adult should get between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Maintain a **balanced diet** and stay hydrated. Lastly, try to get **exercise** 4 times a week.

- **In Summation**

Actively participating in the prevention of spreading the flu is very important for yourself, your loved ones, and others. Possessing the basic knowledge of the flu and applying these practices will minimize your risk of contracting the flu.

For further information on Influenza:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm>