

DISEASE PREVENTION

Influenza (The Flu)



Whitman County
Public Health

What is influenza (the flu)?

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. There are two main types or strains of the flu virus; types A and B. Flu A and B viruses are responsible for seasonal flu epidemics each year.

What is seasonal flu?

Seasonal flu refers to the flu viruses that circulate during the winter months each year and for which immunizations are created to protect people each season.

How is the flu spread?

Flu viruses mainly spread from person to person by droplets. This happens when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are sent through the air and land on the mouth, nose, or eyes of people nearby. Flu viruses may also spread when a person touches droplets on an object or surface and then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes before washing their hands.

Who gets the flu?

Every year in the United States, part of the population becomes sick with the flu. Children younger than 18 are more likely to become sick with the flu than other age groups.

When and for how long is a person able to spread influenza?

Most healthy adults may be able to spread the flu others beginning one day before they feel ill and up to five days after becoming sick. Children and immunocompromised people may pass the virus for longer than ten days.

Some people can be infected with flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, they can still spread influenza to others when they sneeze or cough.

How soon after you are exposed to the flu do symptoms appear?

It can take one to four days (average two days) from when a person is exposed to flu virus for symptoms to develop. Flu symptoms tend to come on suddenly, while cold symptoms usually start slowly.



What are the symptoms of the flu?



People infected with the flu usually have mild symptoms and are able to manage their symptoms on their own.

The flu may include these symptoms:

- Fever (usually $\geq 101^{\circ}\text{F}$)
- Dry cough
- Headache
- Muscle aches/body aches
- Extreme tiredness
- Weakness
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are more common in children than adults.

In rare cases, individuals may develop serious complications with severe symptoms.

Emergency symptoms may include:

- Difficulty breathing/shortness of breath.
- Seizures.
- Chest pain.
- Worsening of existing medical conditions.
- Ongoing dizziness.
- Severe weakness or muscle pain.

In children, bluish color of the skin and dehydration are considered emergency symptoms.

If you experience emergency symptoms of the flu, seek medical care right away.



Some people, including those over 65 or under five years of age, and people with certain conditions are at high risk for serious complications from the flu and should talk to a healthcare provider right away if experiencing symptoms. Taking antiviral medicine to treat the flu may shorten the length of your illness and help prevent more-serious problems.

What can be done to prevent the spread of the flu?



- Get immunized every year! It is the single best way to prevent the flu. It is recommended that all people six months of age or older get a flu immunization.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick. Also, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Wash your hands after disposing of used tissues. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve, not your hands.
- Wash your hands. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or sanitizers may be used.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are frequently spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Use antiviral drugs as prescribed by your healthcare provider to treat the flu.

MODIFIED 9.15.2023

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/flu

