

FACTS ABOUT INFLUENZA

What is influenza?

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses. Influenza infection can sometimes cause severe illness and complications. Several different influenza viruses can cause illness.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

The symptoms of influenza begin suddenly and include a high fever, headache, extreme tiredness, and muscle aches. Two days later a dry cough, sore throat, and a runny or stuffy nose may occur. Children may also have nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza viruses spread when a person with the flu coughs or sneezes and the virus moves through the air and is inhaled by another person. It can also spread when a person touches a surface that has influenza virus on it and then touches their mouth, eyes, or nose. An infected individual can spread the virus 1 day before the symptoms begin and up to 5 days after becoming ill.

Who is at risk for influenza?

Everyone is at risk for influenza. However, children under 5 years of age, people over 65, pregnant women, and people with chronic health problems are at increased risk for serious complications from the flu.

How is influenza diagnosed?

Influenza can be diagnosed through cultures or blood tests, but diagnostic tests are often not done. It is best if samples are taken early in the illness. It is difficult to diagnose influenza by symptoms alone because other diseases have similar symptoms.

How is influenza treated?

People with the flu should drink plenty of fluids, rest and avoid alcohol and tobacco. Over-the-counter medications, when used as directed, may lessen fever, headache and muscle aches. **Aspirin should not be used for infants, children or teenagers because they may be at risk for developing Reye Syndrome.** Antiviral medications may be prescribed for people who have severe symptoms or are at risk for a serious infection. The treatment must begin within the first two days of symptoms and can shorten the course and severity of illness.

-more-

How is the spread of influenza reduced?

1. Careful, frequent handwashing by both staff and children, including infants.
2. Encourage child care staff members to receive their annual vaccination against the flu in October or November. Provide information to parents about the flu vaccine and encourage them to talk to their child's health care provider about getting vaccinated.
3. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
4. Monitor children for signs of illness and send ill children home if they show symptoms of influenza.
5. Avoid touching the eyes, mouth, or nose.
6. Cover mouth and nose with tissues when coughing or sneezing and dispose of tissues in a sanitary manner.
7. Clean and sanitize frequently touched surfaces throughout the day and when visibly soiled.

Exclude for group setting?

Staff and children who are ill should stay home until they have been symptom free for at least 24 hours to avoid infecting other people.

Handwashing

Handwashing is one of the primary ways to stop the spread of influenza and other diseases. The following steps are recommended for good handwashing:

1. Turn on warm water.
2. Apply soap to hands.
3. Rub soap over tops and palms of hands and around fingernails. Scrub hands for approximately 20 seconds.
4. Rinse hands under running water.
5. Dry hands with a clean, disposable towel.

Influenza_factsheet_rev_110411cdos

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant as a substitute for consultation with your health care provider. These fact sheets are reviewed annually. This document is not valid after 06/2012.