

What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) is a very contagious viral infection of the nose, throat, bronchial tubes, and lungs. There are two main types of influenza virus: A and B. Each type includes many different strains which tend to change each year.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person through coughing and sneezing.

What are the signs and symptoms of influenza?

Typical symptoms of influenza are fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, stuff or runny nose, cough, sore throat, and general weakness.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear one to five days after a person is exposed to the virus.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone can get influenza, but some people are at a higher risk of developing severe illness. This includes the elderly, children, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems (such as those with HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes, kidney disease, and transplant patients).

What type of health problems are caused by influenza?

Although most people recover from influenza within one week, some people develop severe illness. These can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, and dehydration. Influenza can also worsen other serious medical conditions such as congestive heart failure, asthma, and diabetes.

How is influenza diagnosed?

There are a number of tests available to test for influenza. Many of these tests require that a healthcare provider swipe the inside of your nose or the back of your throat with a swab and send the swab for testing. At-home tests are also available at many pharmacies.

How is influenza treated?

Most people with influenza have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. Occasionally, your healthcare provider may prescribe antiviral drugs that can shorten how long you have the flu. These drugs work better the sooner they are started; usually within two days after symptoms begin.

How can influenza be prevented?

One of the best ways to prevent influenza is by getting the flu vaccine. Because the types and strains of viruses that cause influenza change often, you should get a flu vaccination every year.

Another way to prevent influenza is by practicing “respiratory etiquette.” To keep yourself and others from getting sick, you should:

- Stay away from other people when you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue away.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

What is the “stomach flu?”

The term “stomach flu” is used to describe illnesses with nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. These symptoms can be caused by many different viruses, bacteria, or even parasites. While vomiting, diarrhea, and being nauseous or “sick to your stomach” can sometimes be related to the flu - particularly in children - these problems are rarely the main symptoms of influenza. Influenza is a specific respiratory disease, and the term “the flu” is sometimes used to describe an illness not caused by the influenza virus.

Who should be vaccinated?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccination every year. It is especially important for children, the elderly, and pregnant women to get vaccinated. If you have concerns about getting the flu vaccine, talk to your healthcare provider.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Utah Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Communicable Diseases, 801-538-6191
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention