

Seasonal Influenza

Flu

What is Influenza?

Seasonal influenza, commonly called “the flu”, is a virus that affects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs). The flu can cause severe illness or even life-threatening complications in many people. Flu season occurs during the fall and winter in the US and usually peaks anywhere from November to March.

How is the flu spread?

The flu virus can be spread by large respiratory droplets from an infected person’s cough or sneeze. Droplet transmission is possible up to 6 feet away. It is also possible, though less common, for a person to become infected after touching a surface or object contaminated with the flu virus and touching their own nose or mouth.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu can range from mild to severe, but come on suddenly. Symptoms can last anywhere from a few days to 2 weeks. A person infected with the flu may experience some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle/body aches
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are more commonly seen in children with the flu

Many complications are associated with the flu, and can be life-threatening. Pneumonia, bronchitis, ear infections and sinus infections are common complications. Chronic health conditions can worsen with the flu, including asthma, congestive heart failure, and diabetes.

How is the flu prevented?

The best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine every year, as soon as it is available. Flu vaccine is recommended for anyone over the age of 6 months (except for individuals with medical contraindications). Other forms of prevention include proper hand washing, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and staying away from sick individuals.

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School Exclusion Policy:

Children with fever associated with the flu are required to be excluded from school until they are fever-free for 24 hours, without the use of fever reducing medication.

Resources:

Center for Disease Control & Prevention-

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/index.htm>

Texas Department of State Health Services-

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/disease/influenza/>