



What is influenza?

Influenza is a contagious respiratory disease that can be prevented by immunization. It is not the “stomach flu.” It is caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs.

What are the symptoms and how soon do they occur after exposure to an ill person?

Influenza symptoms come quickly in the form of fever, dry cough, sore throat, headache, extreme tiredness, nasal congestion, and body aches. These symptoms can be severe and put you in bed for a number of days. Symptoms usually begin within 1-4 days after being exposed to the virus.

When does influenza occur?

In the United States, the peak of flu season can occur anywhere from late December through March. However, this can vary from year to year.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread from an ill person to other people by coughing and sneezing. Although less common, it can also spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose before washing their hands.

How long is a person with flu virus contagious?

The period when an infected person is contagious depends on the age of the person. Adults may be contagious from one day prior to becoming sick and for three to seven days after they first develop symptoms. Some children may be contagious for longer than a week. This is why it is so important to stay home from work or school when you feel sick.

Is influenza serious?

Yes. Some of the complications caused by influenza include pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children may get sinus problems and ear infections as complications from the flu. Those aged 65 years and older and persons of any age with chronic medical conditions are at highest risk for serious complications.

Is there a vaccine for influenza?

Yes. Because the virus may change slightly from year to year the vaccine is changed each year. People who need the vaccine should get vaccinated every year. People who are at risk for getting a serious case of influenza or a complication should get the vaccine. This also includes anyone who has close contact with people who are at risk for getting a serious case of influenza, and anyone who wishes to avoid getting the flu. The vaccine is available from the health department or from a doctor's office.

How can you prevent the spread of influenza?

When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too. Stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Wash your hands often. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.