



## Fact Sheet

# Influenza (Flu)

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### **What is influenza (flu)?**

Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Infection with the flu virus can result in mild to severe illness with life-threatening complications. The flu virus is generally active in the United States from October through May, peaking anywhere from late December through March.

### **Who can get influenza?**

Influenza affects all age groups. However, older people and those who have a chronic disease such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and/or asthma are more likely to become infected and have complications. Pregnant women and children under 5 years of age are also at increased risk from flu complications.

### **What are the symptoms of influenza?**

Symptoms usually appear 1 to 3 days after exposure. Symptoms of the flu include fever, extreme tiredness, headache, muscle pain, dry cough, runny nose, chills, and sore throat. Most people feel better after several days, but cough and tiredness may last two weeks or more. Children may have gastrointestinal problems such as upset stomach, vomiting, or diarrhea.

### **How is influenza spread?**

The influenza virus is spread from person to person by droplets from the nose, throat, and mouth through sneezing, coughing, and speaking. The virus can live on surfaces for 2 to 8 hours. You cannot become infected by receiving the influenza vaccine.

People may be contagious from 1 day before developing symptoms to up to 7 days after getting sick.

### **Are there complications from influenza?**

Complications may include pneumonia (older people are at higher risk), dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children may get sinus or ear infections. In extreme cases, infection with the flu can cause death.

## **Is there a treatment for influenza?**

Stay at home, rest, and drink lots of fluids. Over-the-counter pain relievers can help reduce the discomfort. If symptoms continue to get worse, seek medical care.

If you are at special risk from complications of flu, you should consult your physician when symptoms begin.

Anti-viral drugs are available with a physician's prescription that may reduce the severity of the disease if started early in the course of the illness – usually within 48 hours of the beginning of the symptoms.

Children and teens with influenza should not be given aspirin or aspirin products because of the risk of developing Reye's Syndrome.

## **How can influenza be prevented?**

- Get an annual flu shot. The best time to receive the vaccine is October through November, though you can still benefit from the vaccine after November.
- Reduce contacts with infected persons whenever possible.
- Cough or sneeze into tissues and throw away immediately.
- Wash hands frequently using soap and water or a hand sanitizer.
- Use good hygiene and wash hands before eating and after using the bathroom.
- Get pneumococcal vaccine if you are over 65 or a member of a high-risk group.

## **Who should get an influenza vaccine?**

- Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine each year.
- While everyone should get a flu vaccine, it is especially important that certain people get vaccinated due to being at high risk of infection or complications. These people include:
  - Children younger than 5 years, and especially children under 2 years
  - Adults 65 years of age or older
  - Pregnant women
  - People with medical conditions such as asthma, chronic lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, weakened immune systems, and morbid obesity.
  - Health care workers

## **Why do I have to get the flu vaccine every year?**

Flu viruses change from year to year, so the vaccination from previous years may not protect against the newer viruses. The influenza vaccine is updated to include current viruses each year.

## How do I get more information on influenza?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: 269-969-6383



[www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/](https://www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO)

Website: [www.cdc.gov/flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/)

Spanish: [espanol.cdc.gov/enes/flu/index.htm](http://espanol.cdc.gov/enes/flu/index.htm)

*Influenza*

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