

INFLUENZA

What is Influenza?

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a **contagious disease** that is caused by the influenza virus. It attacks the respiratory tract and it can cause mild to severe illness. At times it can lead to death.

Symptoms:

- Fever, usually high (102-104 degrees F); lasts 3-4 days
- Headache
- General Aches, Pains, often severe
- Fatigue, Weakness; can last up to 2-3 weeks
- Extreme tiredness
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sore throat, sometimes
- Chest Discomfort, Dry Cough; common; and can become severe
- Gastro-intestinal symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, are much more common among children than adults.

Complications:

Some of the complications caused by flu include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children may get sinus problems and ear infections.

How Influenza Spreads:

The flu spreads in respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. It usually spreads from person to person, though occasionally touching something with virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose may infect a person. Individuals may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before getting symptoms and **up to 7** days after getting sick. Children can spread influenza **up to 10 days** after onset of symptoms. This means that you can give someone the flu before you know you're sick as well as while you are sick.

Prevention:

- The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine.
- Certain good health habits can help prevent the flu.
- Antiviral medications may be used to prevent the flu.

Good Health Habits:

- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distances from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- **Stay home when you are sick.** Stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- **Cover your mouth and nose.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- **Clean your hands.** Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs; it is important to scrub your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds and dry them with paper towels.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

What You Should Do if You Get the Flu:

- Rest
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- Take medication to relieve the symptoms of flu (Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms-and particularly fever-without first speaking to your doctor. Giving aspirin to children and teenagers

who have influenza can cause a rare but serious illness called **Reye's syndrome**. Children and teenagers with the flu should get plenty of rest, drink lots of liquids, a

INFLUENZA SEASON AND SCHOOLS

The flu season can range from November through March, and even past March in some years. H1N1 is another type of flu virus which caused several outbreaks during the spring of 2009 and continues to infect people.

Things for Schools to keep in mind:

- Any employee, student, teacher, or staff suspected of having the flu should stay at home.
- Wash hands several times a day using soap and warm water for 20 seconds (this is generally the time it takes to sing the ABC's). Dry hands with paper towels.
- The flu can be spread from coughs and sneezes. Make sure tissues are available in all classrooms. Students and staff should cover their mouths when coughing and use a tissue when sneezing or blowing their noses. Tissues should be thrown away immediately following proper hand washing. All students and staff should avoid sharing glasses, water bottles, drinks and eating utensils.
- School buses, because of the enclosed space, may allow for easy spread of the flu. Tissues should be available on the buses, and children should be encouraged to cover their nose and mouth while coughing or sneezing. Disinfect commonly handled interior surfaces (i.e. door handles, hand rails, etc.) if possible.
- In the school, clean commonly used surfaces such as door handles, handrails, eating surfaces, desks, etc., frequently with approved disinfectant.
- A sick child should stay at home during the first days of illness when symptoms are most severe and the infection is most contagious. Individuals with influenza-like illness need to remain home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100 degrees F, or greater) without the use of fever-reducing medications
- Encourage children to practice good hand washing frequently, and keep their hands away from their eyes, nose and mouth.