



Influenza Virus

Fact Sheet

What is Influenza?

Influenza or flu is a viral infection of the nose, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs. There are two main types of influenza virus: A and B. Type A virus tends to cause more severe illness than type B. Each type includes many different strains, which tend to change each year.

When and for how long is a person able to spread influenza:

The contagious period varies, but probably begins the day before symptoms appear and extends for a week.

What are the symptoms of Influenza?

Typical flu symptoms include headache, fever, chills, cough or sore throat and body aches. Although most people are ill for only a few days, some people have a much more serious illness, such as pneumonia, and may need to be hospitalized.

Who is at risk for Influenza virus?

Anyone can get influenza, but it is most serious in the elderly, in people with chronic underlying illnesses (such as cancer, emphysema or diabetes) or in those with weakened immune systems. The following groups are at increased risk for serious illness with the flu and should receive vaccine:

- All people 50 years of age and older – particularly those 65 years and older.
- Residents of nursing homes and other long term care facilities that house persons of any age who have long-term health illnesses.
- Adults and children with chronic heart or lung problems; including asthma.
- Adults and children who need regular medical care or have a weakened immune system.
- Children and teenagers (aged 6 months to 18 years), receiving long-term aspirin therapy.
- Women who will be in the second or third trimester of pregnancy during the influenza season.

How is Influenza diagnosed?

Usually, a doctor will diagnose a case of the flu based on typical symptoms of fever, chills, headache, cough and body aches.

How is Influenza treated?

Rest and liquids are usually adequate. Antibiotics do not work against the Influenza virus.

How is Influenza spread?

Influenza is highly contagious and is easily transmitted through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person during coughing and sneezing.

How can I reduce my risk of becoming infected with the Influenza virus?

- **Routine Immunization** - Receive routine influenza vaccines
- **Hygiene** – Wash hands frequently, avoid touching nose, eyes and mouth and cover mouth and nose with a clean tissue when coughing or sneezing.