

INFLUENZA (FLU) FACT SHEET

What is flu?

The flu is a contagious viral illness caused by the influenza virus. Humans are usually infected with human influenza virus from other humans. Occasionally humans are infected with an animal influenza virus.

What are the symptoms of flu?

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)

Some people experience vomiting and diarrhea. Symptoms begin 1 to 3 days after being exposed to the virus. Complications caused by flu include: pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening chronic medical conditions (e.g. asthma, heart or lung disease, etc.). Symptoms may last up to one week or longer.

How common is flu?

Every year in the U.S. the seasonal flu causes thousands of hospital admissions and deaths. Flu that occurs every winter season is called the "seasonal flu". In California flu season usually begins in December and continues to March.

Who can get flu?

Anyone can get the flu. Some people are at higher risk of serious health problems when they get sick with the flu. These people include:

- Pregnant women
- Infants
- The elderly
- People with chronic health conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes, heart disease, weak immune system, etc.)

What is the treatment for flu?

Specific treatment for influenza will be determined by your health care provider. Some things you can do to remedy symptoms are:

- Get plenty of rest
- Drink lots of liquids
- Eat healthy foods

Over the counter pain relievers can help individuals feel more comfortable. Children and teens (less than 20 years old) sick with the flu should never take aspirin or aspirin-containing medications without consulting your health care provider.

There are medications available for individuals at higher risk of serious health problems which health care providers use to treat the flu.

How is flu spread?

Flu is spread from person to person by direct contact with an infected person or through the air from coughing and sneezing. The incubation period (time between exposure to flu virus and start of illness) is estimated to range from 1 to 4 days with an average of 2 days. Once infected the virus is shed during the contagious period which last for 5 to 7 days after symptoms begin.

How is flu prevented?

The **best way to prevent illness is by getting vaccinated**. Influenza vaccination is recommended yearly for everyone 6 months and older.

- Get flu vaccine yearly.
- Wash hands often with soap and warm water.
- Use tissue or upper arm when you cough and sneeze. Dispose of the tissue in a covered trash bin.
- Clean shared items (e.g. phones, keyboards, office equipment, toys, etc) more often.
- Avoid crowds.
- Avoid people who are sick with respiratory illness.
- Exclude children with respiratory illness from daycare and school.
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after becoming fever free or finishing medication if you are ill with flu or any respiratory illness.

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/flu/>

Additional information may be found at the following links:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>