

MANAGING YOUR INFLUENZA



Many people get the flu every year, mostly during fall and winter. The virus infects cells of the respiratory tract (from the nose, down the throat, into the windpipe and the lungs). The virus is very small, visible only with a special microscope.

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M.D.

Virus seen with an electron microscope



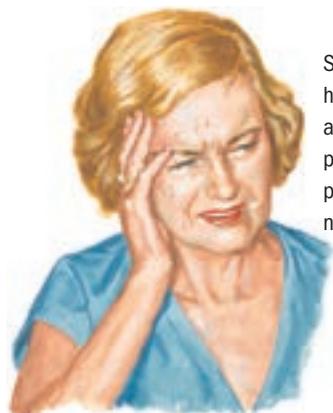
Magnified view

Even larger view



Virus budding
(growing) on a cell

You get the virus by breathing in small droplets that an infected person sneezed into the air. These droplets contain virus.



Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, feeling very weak or tired, and muscle aches. Your health care provider will use symptoms and perhaps tests (of fluid from a runny nose) for diagnosis.

What Is Influenza?

Influenza, or the flu, is a respiratory viral infection. It begins suddenly, lasts for 7 to 10 days, and goes away. Most people recover completely. However, the elderly, the very young, and the immunocompromised can have a more severe course and even die from complications.

Influenza spreads quickly. People get it mostly in fall and winter.

In the USA, over 200,000 people are hospitalized yearly and more than 30,000 die from influenza.

What Causes Influenza?

Influenza is caused by viruses. These are classified as type A, B, or C. Type A is most common.

People get the virus that causes influenza by breathing in small droplets that an infected person has coughed or sneezed into the air, or from touching something that an infected person touched. It's similar to the common cold but worse.

What Are the Symptoms of Influenza?

Symptoms come on suddenly. They usually start 24 to 48 hours after exposure to the flu virus. The worst symptoms and fever usually last 3 to 5 days. They include high temperature (as high as 104° F), chills, muscle aches, feeling very weak or tired, headache, eye pain in bright light, coughing, sneezing, sore throat, runny nose, and upset stomach (more in children than adults). A cough and feeling very weak and tired can last for up to 6 weeks.

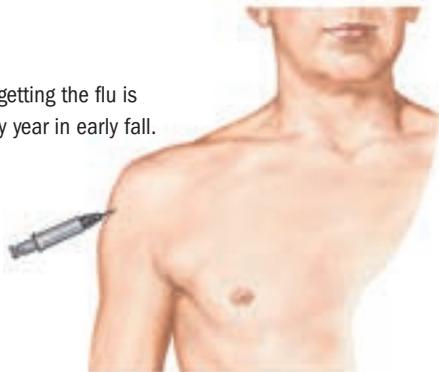
How Is Influenza Diagnosed?

The health care provider will make a diagnosis from the symptoms, especially during fall and winter. At other times of the year, the health care provider may do tests to confirm the diagnosis. Testing may involve taking a sample of liquid from a runny nose or using a blood sample. The health care provider may also order a chest x-ray to check for pneumonia (a complication).



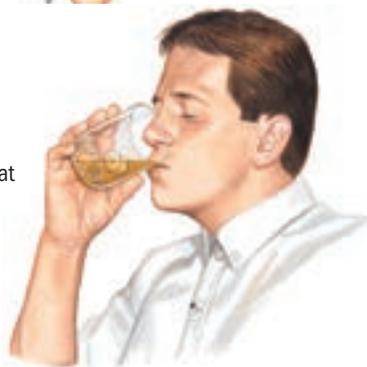
The best treatment is rest. Medicines can control symptoms. Nonaspirin medicines (such as acetaminophen), cough syrups, and decongestants can help you feel better. Don't give aspirin to children with the flu, it can cause Reye's syndrome.

The best way to avoid getting the flu is to have a flu shot every year in early fall.



For up to some weeks after the flu, you may still feel weak, get tired easily, and have a cough.

Drink plenty of fluids (at least 8 glasses daily).



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NOTES

How Is Influenza Treated?

The best treatment is rest. Influenza cannot be cured with antibiotics, but other medicines can control symptoms, and others (antivirals) can shorten its duration. For discomfort, nonaspirin medicines, such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen, cough syrups, and decongestants are used. Don't give aspirin to a child younger than 16 because of the risk of the serious Reye's syndrome.

Warm baths or heating pads can help muscle aches. A cool mist vaporizer may thin secretions, and gargling with warm salt water or mouthwash may ease a sore throat. Drinking lots of fluids is important.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Influenza:

- ✓ **DO** get a flu shot every year.
- ✓ **DO** drink plenty of fluids (at least 8 glasses daily) to thin lung secretions. Small children should avoid milk (it can thicken secretions).
- ✓ **DO** stop smoking to reduce the risk of complications.
- ✓ **DO** rest as much as possible. Continue to rest for 2 or 3 days after the fever goes away.
- ✓ **DO** wash hands often and have those who care for you wash their hands also. Throw away all tissues quickly.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if your fever or cough worsens, you get shortness of breath or chest pain, you cough up bloody sputum, or you have neck pain or stiffness.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have pain with a thick discharge from the ears or sinuses.
- ⊗ **DON'T** go to work or school if you think you have the flu. Avoid spreading the virus to others.
- ⊗ **DON'T** let anyone with a chronic illness or poor immune system (such as those with AIDS or getting chemotherapy) come near a person with the flu.
- ⊗ **DON'T** share glasses or eating utensils.
- ⊗ **DON'T** give aspirin to a child younger than 16.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- Infectious Disease Society of America
Tel: (703) 299-0200
Website: <http://www.idsociety.org>
- National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases
Tel: (301) 496-5717, (866) 284-4107
Website: <http://www.niaid.nih.gov>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Tel: (800) 311-3435
Website: <http://www.cdc.gov>
- WHO Collaborating Center for Influenza
CDC Influenza Branch
Tel: (800) 232-4636
Website: www.cdc.gov/flu/