

Influenza

An illness requiring droplet precautions

This handout describes influenza and its symptoms. It also explains how this disease can be spread and how to keep others from getting it. To learn more, visit the Centers for Disease Control website: www.cdc.gov/flu

What is influenza?

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious illness caused by viruses. The flu can be mild or severe, and at times it can lead to death. The best way to prevent this illness is by getting a flu vaccine each fall.

Every year in the United States, on average:

- 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu
- More than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications
- About 36,000 people die from flu

Older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions are at higher risk for serious flu complications. Some of these problems include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, or worsening of chronic health conditions such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children may have sinus problems and ear infections.

Please call your healthcare provider if you think you have the flu.

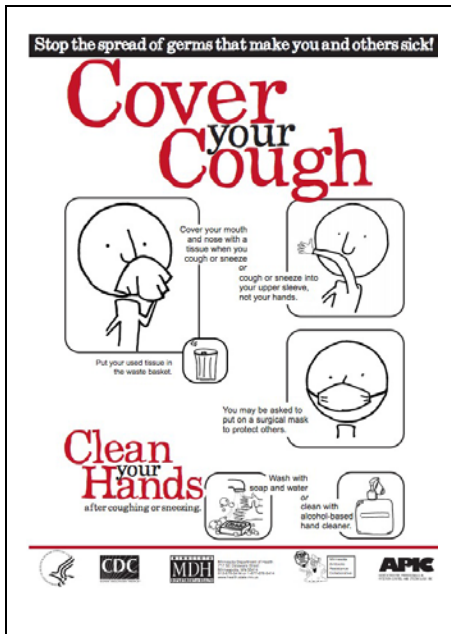
What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of flu include:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Feeling very tired
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (more common in children than adults)



Flu symptoms include muscles aches and having a fever.



How is influenza spread?

Flu viruses spread in tiny droplets produced when someone coughs or sneezes. The disease usually spreads when a person touches something with flu viruses on it and then touches their mouth or nose.

It takes 1 to 4 days for symptoms to appear after a person is exposed to the flu virus. Most adults can infect others starting 1 day before symptoms show and up to 5 days after they get sick. This means that you can spread the flu before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

People with symptoms should practice “respiratory hygiene” by wearing a mask, washing their hands often, and disposing of tissues in wastebaskets when coming into a healthcare facility. Free “Cover Your Cough Kits” are available at the Information Desk and at clinic intake areas.

How is it diagnosed?

It is very hard to tell the flu from other viral or bacterial respiratory illnesses based only on symptoms. A test can confirm that an illness is influenza if the patient is tested within the first 2 to 3 days after symptoms begin. A doctor's exam may be needed to find out whether a person has another infection that is a complication of influenza.

How are others protected from influenza?

At UW Medical Center, we place a “Droplet Precautions” sign near the door of your room. This sign tells healthcare staff and your visitors to observe these precautions when caring for you. If you are in droplet precautions:

- Hospital staff will wear masks, gowns, and gloves when providing care.
- Visitors who have not been vaccinated should not visit you.
- **We advise hand washing for 15 seconds, using alcohol hand gels, and environmental cleanliness.**
- We will ask you to stay in your room unless you need to go to other areas of the hospital for treatment. If you leave your room, we will ask you to wash your hands and wear a yellow gown, gloves, and a mask.
- Please do **not** use the nutrition rooms. When you want a snack or ice water, ask a member of your care team to bring it to you.

When can droplet precautions be stopped?

Droplet precautions for influenza can usually be stopped after 5 days, if you no longer have symptoms.

If you have a compromised immune system, we may need to do follow-up viral laboratory tests to confirm that you are no longer infected with the influenza virus.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Infection Prevention:
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