

Key Facts about Seasonal Influenza (Flu)

Influenza results in 31.4 million outpatient visits each year.

1 Introduction

Seasonal influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory virus. Different from the stomach flu, it infects the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. The peak of the flu season begins in February and continues through May. Please use this guide to understand the cause, symptoms, treatment and prevention of influenza.

2 Cause

The flu virus spreads by inhaling droplets from an infected cough or sneeze. Another way to catch the flu is by touching something that was contacted by an infected person and then touching your mouth, eyes, or nose. People are most contagious a day before you show symptoms and up to 5-7 days after you get sick. Flu viruses continually change over time, causing people to be susceptible to the flu throughout life.

3 Symptoms

Unlike the cold, symptoms of the flu come on suddenly, usually 1-4 days after being exposed to the virus. Common symptoms include:

- Fever
- Fatigue

- Headache
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Chills and sweats
- Muscle or body aches
- Dry, persistent cough

4 Treatment

The best way to treat the flu is with bed rest and plenty of fluids. If the infection becomes severe or you are at high risk for complications, your doctor may prescribe an antiviral medication. The CDC advises that you stay home at least 24 hours after the fever is gone.

5 Prevention

The CDC recommends everyone 6 months of age and older to receive the flu vaccine every year to prevent the flu. Please note that the flu vaccine takes about two weeks to be fully effective.

Other protective measures to prevent the infection and control the spread include:

- Frequent hand-washing
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Stay home while sick
- Avoid crowds during peak flu season

Did you know?

An average of 8% of the U.S. population gets the flu each season.

For more information on influenza, please visit www.lung.org/flu

References:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/flu/symptoms-causes/syc-20351719>

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/index.html>