

## **Influenza (Flu)**

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious disease that is caused by the influenza virus. It attacks the respiratory tract in humans (nose, throat, and lungs). The flu is different from a cold. Influenza usually comes on suddenly and may include fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Gastro-intestinal symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, are much more common among children than adults.

Many people use the term “stomach flu” to describe illnesses with nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. These symptoms can be caused by many viruses, bacteria and even parasites. While vomiting, diarrhea and being nauseous or “sick to your stomach” can sometimes be related to the flu (particularly in children) these problems are rarely the main symptoms of influenza. The flu is a respiratory disease and not a stomach or intestinal disease.

Influenza viruses are spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and spreads virus into the air, and other people inhale the virus. When these viruses enter the nose, throat, or lungs of a person, they begin to multiply, causing symptoms of the flu. The viruses can also be spread when a person touches a surface with flu viruses on it and touches his or her nose and mouth.

The following steps may help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses like the flu:

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
2. Stay home when you are sick. Following the rule of 24 hours fever free before returning to school.
3. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Tissues should be thrown away immediately following by proper hand washing.
4. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Hands should be washed several times a day using soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds (this is generally around the time it takes to sing the ABC's).
5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

If you develop the flu, it is advisable to get plenty of rest and drink a lot of liquid. Also, you can take medications to relieve the symptoms of flu but never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms and particularly fever without first speaking to your doctor. Giving aspirin to children and teenagers who have influenza can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome.

If your flu symptoms are unusually severe, you should consult your health-care provider right away. If you are at special risk from complications of flu, you should consult your health care provider when your symptoms begin.