

INFLUENZA (FLU) FACT SHEET

What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly called "the flu," is caused by influenza viruses when they infect the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs). The "flu season" occurs in the fall and winter.

Who can get the flu?

Anyone. However, people 65 years of age and older, children 5 years and younger, pregnant women, and people with certain chronic health conditions are at a greater risk for serious complications resulting in hospitalization or death.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

People who have the flu often feel some or all of the following signs and symptoms: fever or feeling feverish, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and tiredness. Some people, particularly children, may also have vomiting and diarrhea.

Can a person with the flu spread the infection?

Yes. A person infected with flu may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to about 5-7 days after getting sick. This means that you may be able to spread the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Symptoms start 1-4 days after the virus enters the body (on average 2 days).

How is the flu spread?

The flu virus is thought to spread mainly by droplets made when people with the flu talk, cough, or sneeze. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. You might also get the flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching your eyes, mouth or nose. There are several steps you can take to decrease the spread of the flu:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, scrubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you

cough or sneeze

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as toys, doorknobs, tables, and counters

Is there a vaccine for the flu?

Yes! The flu can be prevented by receiving the seasonal flu vaccine every year. All persons 6 months of age and older are recommended for annual vaccination, with rare exception. The vaccine protects against 3–4 types of flu viruses that are expected to be common during the upcoming flu season. Vaccination is particularly important for persons who are at a greater risk for severe illness, and for people who live with or care for persons at a greater risk for severe illness.

When should a person be vaccinated?

It is best to get vaccinated early in the fall soon after the vaccine becomes available (ideally by October). It takes about 2 weeks after vaccination for the body to become protected against the flu virus.

Are there medicines to treat the flu?

Yes. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines that fight against the flu in your body. While the flu vaccine is the first and most important step in preventing flu, antiviral drugs help treat the flu after you become sick. Antiviral drugs are not a substitute for vaccination.

Should a person with the flu stay home from work or school?

Yes. Try to stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care.

Where can I get more information?

Information about the flu and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit www.doh.dc.gov or call (202) 442-9371.