



Influenza (Flu)

What is influenza (the flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Most healthy people recover from the flu without complications. However, older people, young children, pregnant women and people with certain health conditions are at higher risk for serious complications from the flu.

What are the symptoms?

The flu usually starts suddenly and may include: fever (often high), shaking, (chills), body aches and muscle pain, dry cough, headache, tiredness (can be extreme), sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and loss of appetite.

How is the flu different from a common cold?

The flu and the common cold are caused by different viruses. Their symptoms are similar and it may be difficult to determine which virus a person has. In general, flu symptoms are more intense. A person with a cold is less likely to have a fever and more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose and a hacking cough.

What are the risks of having the flu?

The flu may lead to other health problems such as bacterial pneumonia or dehydration. It may also make chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes worse.

How is the flu spread?

The flu virus is spread through the air (coughing and sneezing) or person to person (shaking hands). It is possible to give someone else the flu before you know you are sick and while you are sick.

When can I return to work or school?

If you are sick with flu-like illness, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)

How can you reduce your chances of getting the flu?

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue away.
- Cough or sneeze into your bent elbow.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. If no sink is available, rub your hands with alcohol or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- If you get the flu, stay home from work or school.
- Get a flu shot every year.

How is the flu treated?

If you get the flu, try to rest, drink a lot of liquids and avoid drinking alcohol or smoking. You may take over-the-counter medications to relieve the symptoms of the flu. Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever. Aspirin use may increase the risk of Reye's Syndrome. Your health care provider may prescribe anti-viral medications if your visit is within the first 48 hours after experiencing your first symptoms.

People at high risk for complications from the flu should consult their health care provider if they develop flu-like symptoms. Those at high risk include people 65 years or older, people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women and young children.

For more information, contact the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division at 336-641-7777 or visit our website at www.guilfordcountync.gov or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.

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