

Prevention

The most effective way to prevent the flu is to receive a flu shot. The flu vaccine contains the specific viruses that are expected to cause illness that year, so it is important to be vaccinated every year. Vaccination generally helps prevent the flu, but it can also decrease the severity of the flu if you do get it. For local flu shot locations and availability, contact your local Breathe California office.



Vaccination is especially important for the following people, who are either at a high-risk for influenza complications or come into frequent contact with high-risk individuals:

- Adults over the age of 50
- Children between 6 months and 2 years old
- People with serious medical conditions, including respiratory, heart or kidney diseases, a weakened immune system or blood disorders
- Health care workers and others who come into frequent contact with high-risk people
- Women who are/will be pregnant during flu season should consult their physician

You can also help prevent the spread of the flu by practicing good personal cleanliness. Wash your hands often, avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose, and refrain from sharing drinks or utensils with others. Also, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze to prevent spreading the virus to others if you are already infected.



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Influenza



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What is Influenza?

Influenza, more commonly called the flu, is a contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. Most healthy people will recover from the flu on their own within one or two weeks. For the very young, the elderly and people with prior medical conditions, however, influenza can lead to serious or even fatal complications, most commonly pneumonia. The best way to prevent the flu is to receive a flu vaccine every year.

FAST FACT

More than 200,000 people are hospitalized for flu complications each year, and an average of 36,000 people die each year from the flu.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Causes of Influenza

Influenza is caused by a virus in the respiratory system. When the virus reaches the lungs, the tissues in the respiratory tract become swollen and inflamed.

The disease can be passed on to others when an infected person releases the virus into the air through sneezing, coughing or talking. It can also be transmitted by direct hand or mouth contact. Individuals can infect others before feeling sick and up to five days after symptoms appear.

Symptoms of Influenza

Influenza symptoms usually come on suddenly. Generally, a person will have a high fever for about three days. Respiratory symptoms - which include a sore throat, cough, runny or stuffy nose - usually last an additional three or four days. A person may also continue to have a dry, hacking cough for up to ten days after other symptoms are gone. Headaches, fatigue, weakness, muscle aches and loss of appetite are other common symptoms of influenza.

Is it a Cold or the Flu?

Although they are often mistaken for each other, there are some key differences between the common cold and the flu:

Symptoms	Cold	Flu
Fever	Rare	Characteristic, high (102-104° F)
Headache	Rare	Prominent
General aches, pains	Slight	Usual; often severe
Fatigue, weakness	Quite mild	Can last up to 2-3 weeks
Extreme exhaustion	Never	Early and prominent
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild to moderate; hacking cough	Common; can become severe

Treatment

For a common case of the flu, the best treatment is to rest and drink plenty of fluids. Most people recover within a week or two on their own. However, children under the age of two, adults over the age of fifty and people with chronic medical conditions are at high risk for developing complications from



influenza. High-risk individuals should get an annual flu shot and contact their doctor if they believe that they have the flu.

Antiviral drugs can treat particular strains of influenza. These are most effective when given within two days of when symptoms appear. Antiviral drugs may help to reduce the duration of the disease, but they should not be used in place of vaccination.

“For the young, the elderly and those with medical conditions, influenza can lead to serious or even fatal complications.”

Antibiotics, which are only effective at fighting bacteria, can not be used to treat influenza since it is caused by a virus. Taking antibiotics while afflicted by the flu could create antibiotic-resistant bacteria and lessen the effectiveness of antibiotics when you really need them.