

INFLUENZA

→ Childcare and preschools use these pages, schools use pages 212-213

Influenza (also known as flu) is a very common upper respiratory disease. Influenza is not what is commonly referred to as “the stomach flu,” which is a term used by some to describe illnesses causing vomiting or diarrhea. Every year, millions of people in the United States get influenza.

CAUSE: Influenza virus. The two main types of influenza viruses are type A and type B. Within each type there are many related strains or subtypes, which can change every year. This is the reason a person can get influenza more than once and why a person should get vaccinated every year. Influenza A and B most often cause very large numbers of respiratory illness (epidemics). Epidemics usually occur between November–April.

SYMPTOMS: Starts quickly with fever, body aches, headache, cough, runny nose, sore throat, chills. Illness lasts at least three days. Children may develop ear infections, pneumonia, or croup as a result of influenza infection.

People with chronic health problems or weakened immune systems may develop pneumonia or bronchitis.

SPREAD: When a person with influenza coughs or sneezes tiny droplets with influenza virus into the air, and another person breathes them in. Spread can also occur by touching the secretions from the nose and mouth of an infected person or by touching hands, tissues, or other items soiled with these secretions.

INCUBATION: It takes from 1 to 4 days, usually 2 days, from the time of infection until symptoms begin.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD: Most contagious during the 24 hours before the illness begins (very young children may be contagious longer than 24 hours before onset). Adults are generally contagious 5 days after onset of illness, and children can still shed the virus in secretions from the nose for 7 days after the illness begins.

EXCLUSION: Until fever is gone and the child is well enough to participate in routine activities.

DIAGNOSIS: Call your healthcare provider if your child has a high fever and/or persistent cough. Viral cultures may be taken.

TREATMENT: Call your healthcare provider. Medications (antiviral) will shorten the course of illness if given within 36-48 hours after the symptoms begin.

DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN or SALICYLATE CONTAINING MEDICATIONS TO ANY CHILD OR ADOLESCENT UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE. There is a risk of developing Reye syndrome (a serious condition which can cause death) when children or adolescents take aspirin for viral illnesses such as chickenpox or influenza.

PREVENTION/CONTROL:

1. Influenza vaccine is encouraged for children 5 years of age or younger, especially infants 6 months to 23 months of age. Persons caring for this group should also be vaccinated. Anyone who wants to be protected against influenza should get an annual influenza vaccination. The vaccine is usually given in the late fall or can be given any time during the influenza season.

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PREVENTION/CONTROL CONTINUED:

2. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with secretions from the nose or mouth. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.**
3. Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or cough/sneeze into a sleeve.
4. Dispose of used tissues.
5. Clean and disinfect mouthed toys at least daily and when soiled.

For more information, you or your healthcare provider may call Hennepin County Community Health Department at (952) 351-5230, or call your local health department.