

Updated Sep 09, 2009: Watch for regular updates at www.flula.com or www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance because the situation changes rapidly.

**A Pandemic is like a medical hurricane, we cannot stop it
BUT the more we know about it, the more we can prepare and be safe**

Suspect influenza:

- fever > 37.8° C [100° F] & cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.
- You need to find out who may have influenza for yourself, your family, friends and coworkers

Sick coughers, singers, talkers and sneezers spread influenza

Sick people are those who spread the infection to others. When sick people speak, sing, sneeze or cough, they put out thousands of droplets that are full of viruses. If a droplet hits a healthy person, they'll get infected and become sick in a day or two.

Stay away from sick people (3 to 6 ft). These droplets do not travel very far, usually 3 ft, not more than 6 ft

The virus is present until 1 day after the acute illness goes away

Sick people carry the virus in their respiratory tract from the beginning of the sickness to a day after they recover (one day after the fever is gone if no anti-fever medication is used)

The influenza viruses do survive outside the body and can still make people sick when they pick them up and bring them to their mouths

When the droplets land on someone's hand, clothes, furniture, food or any other surface the viruses stay infectious for a long time. Hands will pick up the virus and bring them to the mouth of healthy people to make them sick

Masks may be useful if used correctly

- Wear them if you are sick and come close to someone else (3 to 6 ft)
- A wet mask does not work. Throw it away if it is wet.
- A mask does trap viruses so you must throw it in the trash and use hand sanitizer or wash hands afterwards.
- Simple (surgical) disposable masks are effective in preventing the sick person to spread viruses and in protecting the healthy person in close contact to a sick person (less than 3 to 6 ft).

There is no easy way to confirm that someone is sick from influenza. Your doctor does not need to get a lab test to treat you correctly.

- Confirming that someone has influenza is expensive and takes several days. Decisions about treatment and prevention cannot wait so testing is not very useful.
- Doctors treat the people with signs and symptoms typical of influenza as if they had influenza.

Most influenza is mild but some cases may be severe

For most people, this flu is mild and self-limited and can easily be treated at home with bedrest. However, people who have underlying medical conditions, women who are pregnant, or very young children should contact their doctor if they develop flu symptoms to see if they need further interventions or medications.

Healthy people have a mild illness most of the time

Try to stay in good general health; Get plenty of sleep; Be physically active; Manage your stress; Drink clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks or electrolyte beverages for infants) to keep from being dehydrated; Eat nutritious food.

Know the high risk factors and see a doctor if you or someone in your family has any of these and seems to have the flu:

If you have any doubt, ask your doctor if you are at high risk of influenza complications

- Younger than 5 years old or older than 65 years;
- Pregnant women
- Chronic lung (including asthma), heart (except high blood pressure), kidney, liver, blood (including sickle cell disease), nerve, muscle conditions and diabetes
- Immuno-suppressed (including high dose steroid treatment, chemotherapy, HIV/AIDS, transplant)
- Younger than 19 years of age receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities

Drugs (antivirals) are not a magic bullet

- They are indicated for people at risk of complications, for those who have severe illness and those who are hospitalized.
- Antivirals are not as effective as antibiotics are for bacterial infections.
- They work only if given within 24 to 48 hours of illness onset.
- They do not suppress the infection, they only shorten the length of illness and prevent complications.
- If we use them too much, resistance will develop.

The best prevention is to get the vaccine

It takes time to develop an effective vaccine. When it comes out, it will be the best tool we have to prevent illness.

THERE IS NO EASY WAY TO PREVENT THE INFLUENZA SPREAD AT HOME, AT WORK, AT SCHOOL

Stay home when sick and keep your children at home when they are sick

--Stay home until one day after acute symptoms are gone: No more fever, major cough gone, sore throat gone.

--This isolation period is recommended whether or not antiviral medications are used.

--If a household member is sick, watch their health and the health of other family members for fever and other symptoms of the flu. Keep any children, and adults home if they show any sign of getting sick.

Sick people are those who spread the illness. The illness is usually short (few days) so staying home will not make you miss too much school or work.

Keep the sick family members away from the rest

Those that are ill are those who spread the infection to others. They should be separated as soon as possible.

--Keep the sick family members in a separate room of the house.

--They can go outside but ask them not to go in crowded places (malls, stores, movie theaters...) and not to participate in any activity bringing them in close contact with others (games, sports...).

Follow cough etiquette, teach it to your family

--Cover your cough and sneeze with a tissue or your sleeve, not with your hands.

--Dispose of tissues safely in the trash; sanitize hands after using a tissue with alcohol based sanitizer or wash hands.

--Stay away from sick people, at least 3 to 6 ft.

The main sources of viruses are people with symptoms. People that do not cough or sneeze are much less infectious than those that do.

Follow hand hygiene, teach it to your family

--Use hand sanitizers after touching surfaces and objects commonly touched

--Wash hands when they are dirty. Hands are the main way to bring the viruses from a contaminated object to your mouth

--Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

--Keep hand sanitizers away from young children.

--Gels, rubs, and hand wipes work well, as long as they contain at least 60 percent alcohol.

--Hand wipes must be thrown in the trash.

Teach your children not to share personal items: Food, drinks, eating utensils, clothes, towels, ...

Closing the school is often not the solution

--The virus spreads in a community over several weeks. When the school reopens, students or teachers who are sick will bring the virus back in the school. To be effective the closure would have to be very long (weeks).

--Students often gather outside the school and the illness continues to spread.

--Closing the school for complete disinfection is not useful. As soon as the school re-opens, sick people will spread viruses all over the place. Routine cleaning is more effective.

But school closures are sometimes useful

--A school with most students at high risk of complications may be closed to allow for medical evaluation of the students

--No effective teaching may take place in a school with a high absenteeism rate.

--The decision to close a school must be decided on a case by case considering: 1-Epidemiologic considerations (duration and peak of outbreak in the specific community), 2-Severity of the epidemic, 3-Medical risk of students, 4-Learning environment

AT HOME

When to seek emergency care: Get medical care right away if the sick person at home:

--has difficulty breathing or chest pain --has purple or blue discoloration of the lips

--is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down --has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions)

--is less responsive than normal or becomes confused

--has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry.

Routine cleaning

--Areas which are usually touched should be cleaned regularly: tables, doorknobs, keyboards, surfaces in the bathroom, counters and toys for children.

--Usual disinfectants will work.

--The virus may survive for days if the environment is suitable.

--The influenza virus is easily inactivated by common disinfectants.

Self medication

--Do **not** give aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) to children or teenagers who have the flu; this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome. --Check ingredient labels on over-the-counter cold and flu medications to see if they contain aspirin.

--Children 5 years of age and older and teenagers with the flu can take medicines *without* aspirin, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®), to relieve symptoms.

--Children younger than 4 years of age should **NOT** be given over-the-counter cold medications without first speaking with a health care provider.

--The safest care for flu symptoms in children younger than 2 years of age is using a cool-mist humidifier and a suction bulb to help clear away mucus.

--Fever and aches can be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®) or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).
