

What is the flu

The flu is the short form for Influenza. Influenza is a very contagious viral infection, which affects the nose, throat, airways and lungs. There are two main types of influenza: Influenza A and Influenza B, Each type has many different strains, which tend to change from year to year.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Early symptoms may be similar to having a cold, such as stuffy or runny nose, cough and sore throat but typical flu symptoms usually includes fever, muscle pains, headache and general weakness. The symptoms usually appear 1 – 5 days after exposure to the virus. People with flu are often bedridden for up to 5-10 days.

How is the flu spread?

The flu is spreads when an infectious persons coughs or sneezes expelling the virus into the air where it is inhaled by someone close by to them. Also, the virus can survive on hard surfaces such as countertops and tables for up to 48 hours, or on other surfaces for example clothes for up to 10 hours and skin up to 5 minutes. If a person touches a contaminated surface they may pick up the flu virus on their hands and unintentionally infect themselves if contact is then made with their mouth, nose or eyes.

Can the flu be dangerous?

Yes the flu can be dangerous. Although most people recover very well from the flu within 10-14 days, some people may have very serious complications such as pneumonia and respiratory failure and may need to be hospitalised. Some more vulnerable people may even die from the flu or related complications.

Who is most at risk of complications from the flu?

As with any disease a person of any age may get complications resulting from the flu. Those considered most at risk are people who are elderly, those with long term or chronic sickness those with weakened immune systems and on dialysis and those in long term care facilities such as Care of Elderly facilities, residential units.

Can the spread of flu be prevented?

People who develop flu symptoms can help reduce the risk of spread to others especially more vulnerable people by following good 'respiratory practices'. Here are some simple steps to help you from spreading the flu virus:

- **Stay away from hospitals, nursing homes, schools and the work place**

if you have flu symptoms. Check with you doctor if you are unsure.

- **Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when sneezing or coughing. Then throw the tissue away in a waste bin. Do not carry a used tissue around in your pocket.**
- **Wash your hands with soap and water frequently during the day to reduce the numbers of flu virus on your hands.**
- **Also, wash hands before handling and eating food.**

Flu Vaccine

Getting the flu vaccine each year is an excellent means of reducing the risk of getting the flu, when the flu vaccine matches the virus in circulation. It is not possible to accurately predict they type of flu virus that will be circulating each year. Worldwide, experts use the knowledge of virus types in circulation in previous years in their efforts to predict the next year flu strain (type). The vaccine may give 70%-80% protection against the flu or reduce the risk the severity of illness.

Who should consider getting the flu vaccine?

- People most at risk of flu complications particularly the elderly and those with weakened immune systems.
- Health Care Workers

- Carers of the elderly or those who may care for sick family members

If you are considering getting the flu vaccine you should discuss it with your doctor particularly if you are taking prescribed medications.

If you would like more information or have any questions relating to the flu, a member of the Infection Control Team would be happy to speak to you. The ward staff will contact a member of the team on your behalf.

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Flu (Influenza)

**PATIENT/VISITOR
INFORMATION LEAFLET**