

COLD OR INFLUENZA

How to tell the difference

Symptoms	Cold	Influenza
Fever	Rare	Characteristic, high (102–104F); lasts 3–4 days
Headache	Rare	Prominent
General aches	Slight	Usual; often severe
Fatigue, weakness	Quite mild	Can last 2–3 weeks
Extreme exhaustion	Never	Early and prominent
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild—moderate hacking cough	Common; can become severe
Complications	Sinus congestion or earache	Bronchitis, pneumonia; can be life-threatening
Prevention	None	Annual vaccination
Treatment	Temporary relief of symptoms	Antiviral medicines

Additional Resources

For information regarding influenza activity across the state, please visit the following website:

Florida DOH Bureau of Epidemiology–Influenza Surveillance

http://www.doh.state.fl.us/disease_ctrl/epi/htopics/flu

or contact your local county health department for information in your area.

For information regarding influenza activity nationally and worldwide, please visit the following websites:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu>

World Health Organization:

<http://www.who.int/en/>

For information regarding influenza vaccine recommendations and supply please visit the following website:

Florida DOH Bureau of Immunization

http://www.doh.state.fl.us/disease_ctrl/immune/influenza.html

INFLUENZA

A GUIDE FOR HOSPITALS



What patients and healthcare workers need to know about influenza...



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WHAT IS THE FLU AND HOW CAN IT BE PREVENTED?

Influenza (commonly called “the flu”) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Infection with influenza viruses can result in illness ranging from mild to severe and life-threatening complications. An estimated 10% to 20% of U.S. residents get the flu each year. An average of 114,000 people are hospitalized for flu-related complications and 36,000 Americans die each year from complications of the flu.

At Risk Population

Certain people are at increased risk for serious complications from the flu. This group includes: children 6-23 months old, people age 65 years and older, adults and children with chronic medical conditions and pregnant women.

Acute care facilities (such as hospitals) have an added concern about influenza due to the nature of the setting where caregivers come in close contact with multiple patients on a daily basis.

Other concerns for hospitals regarding influenza besides the spreading of the virus from staff to patients and vice versa include:

- High volume of a non-stable population at risk for complications due to chronic health conditions.
- Over-crowding in waiting rooms that are shared by patients with various illnesses and conditions.
- Many hospital emergency departments serve as the primary care center for the very ill.
- Rotating part-time staff that can introduce the virus to multiple facilities.

Preventing the Flu

The best prevention method against the flu is vaccination. Getting a flu shot every year is recommended for hospital caregivers and staff who come in close contact with patients. Caregivers, visitors and even cleaning crews can spread influenza from patient to patient.

Other methods to help prevent the spread of influenza are:

1. Wash your hands often. This will help protect you from a variety of illnesses, including the flu.
2. Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze will help protect those around you from getting sick.
3. Avoid contact with others when you are sick. If possible, staff should stay home from work if they are sick. In addition, isolating sick patients whenever possible will help prevent the spread of influenza.

Complications

Some of the complications caused by the flu include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

If patients or healthcare staff are in a group that is considered to be at high risk for complications from the flu and they get flu-like symptoms, they should consult with a health-care provider immediately.

Early warning signs of complications that need immediate attention can include:

- High or prolonged fever
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Near fainting or fainting
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Muscle ache

Flu vaccination is recommended for all health-care workers and hospital staff that come in contact with patients.

Other Issues

Outbreaks. An outbreak of influenza in a hospital can be a serious life-threatening situation. If an outbreak of influenza is suspected, notify your local county health department immediately.

Testing. Specimens can be submitted to the State Laboratories in Jacksonville and Tampa for testing to verify possible influenza outbreaks. The local county health department will work closely with the State Department of Health to determine testing needs.

Protective Measures. It is recommended that patients in waiting rooms with suspected respiratory illnesses be supplied with masks and tissues to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses to other patients.

Vaccine Timing. The best time to receive the flu vaccine is during October and November. However, getting immunized in December or later can still provide protection against the flu. Typically in adults, antibody protection against the flu will develop about two weeks after receiving the vaccination.

Staff Vaccination. It is highly recommended that all staff be vaccinated not only to prevent the spread of influenza to patients but also to prevent the spread of influenza from the facility to the community by exposing family and friends to the virus.

