



Influenza: Keeping healthy this flu season

What is Influenza?

Influenza, or the flu, is a highly contagious disease caused by infection from influenza type A or B (or rarely C) virus. These viruses infect the upper airways and lungs but can also affect other parts of the body. In Australia, outbreaks of influenza of varying severity occur every year, usually between May and September.

How do I know if I have it?

The flu is more than a bad cold. Symptoms usually appear one to three days after being infected. A person can spread influenza to others a day or two before they become unwell and up to five days after they have become unwell for adults. It can be even longer for young children.

The symptoms of influenza can include the following:

- fever
- dry cough
- muscle and joint pain
- tiredness/extreme exhaustion
- headache
- sore throat
- stuffy nose.

I think my child has it

Symptoms to be concerned about in young children include:

- high fever
- listlessness or lack of energy
- cough.

Children can also get diarrhoea and vomiting with the flu. If you are concerned about your child's symptoms, consult your GP or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

How long does it normally last?

Most people recover within a week, although a cough and tiredness may persist.

What should I do?

If you have flu-like symptoms, the following steps are advised:

- stay at home, don't go to work or school
- avoid visiting aged care facilities and hospitals, if possible, so that you don't pass the infection to others who may be at risk of complications
- wash your hands regularly with soap and water or try a disinfectant wipe or sanitiser gel
- always cough into a tissue
- dispose of tissues quickly
- use soap and water to keep surfaces such as door handles, kitchen bench tops, phones, and key boards clean
- drink plenty of fluids and rest
- paracetamol is useful for a fever
- consult your GP or call 13 Health (13 43 25 84) if you are concerned about your symptoms.

Can there be complications?

While most people recover from influenza within a week, influenza can sometimes lead to severe complications such as pneumonia or brain inflammation. Young children, elderly people and those with certain chronic illnesses are more likely to develop complications. Influenza can also be fatal.

How does it spread?

The virus that causes influenza is mainly spread from person-to-person by virus-containing droplets produced during coughing or sneezing. The droplets can be spread up to a metre through the air and enter the body through the nose and mouth. A person can also catch influenza if they shake hands with an infected person or touch a contaminated surface such as a door knob or telephone, and then touch their nose or mouth.

Should I get vaccinated?

The annual influenza vaccination, or flu shot, provides good protection against the flu.

The vaccination is strongly recommended for people in high risk groups, these include:

- people aged 65 years or older, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years or older
- adults and children with a chronic disease, especially heart conditions, lung disease, kidney disorders or diabetes
- children with cyanotic congenital heart disease
- adults and children who are on therapy which lowers their immunity
- residents of nursing homes and residential care facilities
- pregnant women who will be in the second or third trimester of pregnancy (even if already pregnant) between May and September
- children (six months to 10 years) on long term aspirin therapy.

Vaccination is also recommended for anyone who is in contact with people in high risk groups, including:

- anyone who lives in a household with a person who fits into any of the high risk categories

- anyone who works in a nursing home or long term care facility
- health care workers.

The vaccine is provided free under the National Immunisation Program to anyone aged 65 and over, and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged 50 or older, or those aged 15-49 who have risk factors.

See your GP for more information.

What else can I do to be protected?

A number of precautions can be taken to reduce your risk of catching the flu.

- Hygiene is the key. Make sure you wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand rubs to disinfect hands.
- Try to avoid contact with infected people. If you can't, then stand at least one metre away from the infected person and don't stand directly opposite them.
- Make sure any tissues used by an infected person are immediately put in a waste bin. If you do handle a tissue, wash your hands afterwards.
- Use soap and water to keep surfaces such as door handles, kitchen bench tops, phones and computer key boards clean.
- Drink plenty of fluids and keep healthy with fruit and vegies.

Help and assistance

For further information, please contact your local doctor.

Other resources

[Influenza fact sheet](#)

[Influenza media releases](#)