

Pandemic Preparedness Series

Article 1

Influenza Facts for a Healthy Family

Influenza is a contagious viral respiratory disease, which can cause mild to severe illness. Every year in the United States, 5% to 20% of people become ill with some form of Influenza. More than 200,000 people are hospitalized with influenza each year and 36,000 people die.

Symptoms of Influenza include:

- High fever
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches

Complications that may occur due to Influenza:

- Bacterial Pneumonia
- Dehydration
- Worsening of chronic health conditions
- Sinus infections
- Ear infections

The best way to prevent influenza is by receiving a yearly influenza vaccination. Some people, including older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for influenza complications. For information on influenza vaccines, please contact your physician or local health department.

How Influenza spreads

Influenza is spread by droplets that are released by coughing and sneezing. It is usually spread from person to person, though it can spread by touching surfaces with the influenza virus on it, then touching your mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms of influenza start and up to five days after symptom onset. This means that you are able to spread influenza to others even before you know you are ill.

Pandemic Influenza

Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak of influenza that occurs when a new influenza virus appears in the human population, causes serious illness, and easily spreads between people worldwide. Pandemics are different from seasonal influenza in that seasonal influenza is caused by influenza subtypes that are already occurring among people. Pandemic outbreaks are caused by new subtypes of influenza that have never occurred in people or have occurred a very long time ago. Past influenza pandemics have led to large amounts of illness, death, social disruption, and economic loss.

Protecting Yourself

There are several things you can do to protect yourself and your family from the flu. The most important is practicing good health habits.

Clean your hands. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Influenza can live on your hands for 5 minutes. So it is important to wash your hands after sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose.

Clean Surfaces. Influenza can live on plastic and stainless steel surfaces for 24 hours. These surfaces can be cleaned with 10% bleach solution.

Cover your mouth and nose. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Remember to dispose of your tissue immediately in a trash can.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

Stay home when you are sick. If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness

Avoid close contact. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.

For more information on influenza and Pandemic flu visit the following websites:

www.cdc.gov • www.who.org • www.pandemicflu.com • www.in.gov/isdh/

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