

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

INFLUENZA

Influenza (the flu) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by a virus. There are two main types of influenza virus: A and B. Each type includes many different strains which tend to change each year.

Symptoms

Symptoms like these usually begin suddenly 1-4 days after exposure to someone with influenza:

- Fever and chills (sometimes as high as 104° F and lasts 2-3 days)
- Body aches, headache, weakness, feeling very tired
- Cough, sore throat, or runny nose
- Occasionally, people may have nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (particularly children). These are rarely the main symptoms of influenza and they are often due to some other infection.

Transmission

- Flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.
- Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.
- "Flu season" occurs in Ohio from November through March. Some years are worse than others, and epidemics can occur periodically, like the 2009 H1N1 pandemic that affected the entire globe.
- The viruses that cause flu frequently change, so people who have been infected or given a flu shot in previous years can become infected with a new strain.

Treatment

- It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from similar illnesses on the basis of symptoms alone. A nose swab can be taken to confirm that an illness is influenza.
- Most people who get influenza will recover in one to two weeks, but some people will develop life-threatening complications as a result of the flu. These are most common in people older than 65, people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women, and very young children. Approximately 36,000 Americans die each year from the flu. Antiviral medications can be used if the illness is caught early.
- Never give aspirin to a teenager or child, as they can become seriously ill with Reye Syndrome.

Prevention

- The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a vaccine each year. Everyone over 6 months old can get it.
- WASH YOUR HANDS after using Kleenex, sneezing, or coughing. Cough into your sleeve, not your hands.
- You cannot get the flu from the vaccine, but there are hundreds of other infections that the vaccine does not prevent.

What about reactions to the vaccine?

- You CANNOT get the flu from the vaccine. Most people have little or no reaction to the vaccine.
- One in four people might have a swollen, red, tender area where the vaccination was given.
- A few people might develop a slight fever, headache, or feel a little sick within 24 hours of the shot.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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