

Caring Pediatrics



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INFLUENZA

Influenza, or flu, is a highly contagious viral illness that can occur in people of any age, most frequently in the winter months. The virus can be spread from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, or by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and then touching your nose or mouth. A person is considered contagious one day before the symptoms start and up to seven or more days afterwards, until the fever resolves. In children this time frame can be longer.

There are several general "types" of influenza:

1) SEASONAL FLU: Symptoms of seasonal flu usually include fever that persists more than 24 hours, headache, muscle aches, and fatigue. Cough and sore throat may also be present. Flu symptoms usually improve over two to five days. Weakness and fatigue may persist for several weeks.

2) H1N1 Influenza A (Swine): This represents a new strain that started affecting humans a few months ago. Although the first cases were in Mexico, it has quickly spread around the world. The symptoms are similar to those of seasonal flu. Vomiting and diarrhea are more commonly seen with this flu. It is not possible to become infected by eating pork.

3) AVIAN FLU: Avian influenza (bird flu) is a strain of influenza virus that originally infected birds. Transmission to humans is rare. Most humans who became infected with avian flu had direct contact with sick or dead poultry or wild birds, or had visited a live poultry market.

TREATMENT: Rest, drink plenty of fluids, use Acetaminophen to relieve fever or pain. Avoid aspirin or aspirin-containing products in children under 18 because it can lead to a serious disease called Reye syndrome. Coughing will go away with time and cough suppressants are usually not helpful. There are antiviral medications that can help reduce the severity and duration of these symptoms. Not everyone requires treatment with this type of medication. Antibiotics are NOT useful for treating viral illnesses such as influenza.

PREVENTION AND INFECTION CONTROL: One of the most effective ways to prevent infection with influenza is the influenza vaccine. Please call your doctor to get vaccinated with the flu vaccine.

These measures can help prevent the spread of influenza and most other infections.

- 1) Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. You can use alcohol-based hand sanitizers if soap and water are not available.
- 2) Avoid face-to-face contact with anyone while they are sick. If it cannot be avoided use a face mask.
- 3) Cover your mouth and nose should while coughing or sneezing, and dispose of tissues immediately.