

INFLUENZA

(The Flu)

What is influenza?

Influenza, or the flu, is a common, contagious, infection caused by the Influenza virus. It mainly involves the respiratory tract. It is not the same as the “stomach flu,” which is mainly nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.



How did I catch the flu?

Most people catch the flu by breathing in droplets made when people with the flu cough, sneeze, or talk. Less often, it is caught by touching a surface that has the flu virus on it, then touching your own mouth, nose, or eyes. People can spread the flu starting one day **before** they have symptoms, and continue to spread it for 5-7 days once they feel ill.

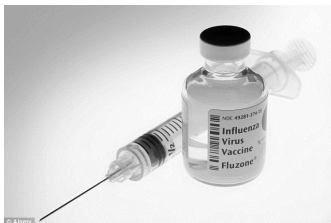
What are the symptoms of the flu?

Once you’ve been exposed, it may take 1-4 days to become ill, with an average of two days. The symptoms of influenza tend to come on rapidly. You may feel fine, then a few hours later you might have any combination of the following symptoms:

- chills
- fever (temp of 100.4°F or more)
- fatigue
- muscle aches
- cough
- sore throat
- nasal congestion
- headache
- diarrhea/nausea (more common in children)

Why worry about the flu?

Everyone can get influenza, and it spreads rapidly every winter when it arrives on campus. It takes most people 5-7 days to recover, and it is easy to fall behind in your schoolwork during that time. You can also develop pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, and dehydration as a result of the flu. Lastly, influenza is also highly contagious and can cause death, mainly in the elderly and the very young. As a young person, you can help protect these people by preventing yourself from spreading the infection.



Are there certain people at special risk of complications when they get the flu?

Some people are at risk for developing serious flu-related complications. They should seek immediate medical attention if they think they have the flu. They include people:

- Children < 5 years old
- Adults 65 years old or over
- Pregnant women
- Residents of long-term care facilities
- Native Americans

It also includes people with these conditions:

- asthma (even if “only” exercise induced)
- neurological disorders
- chronic lung disease
- heart disease
- blood disorders (e.g. sickle cell)
- diabetes
- kidney disease
- liver disease
- metabolic disorders
- weak immune systems
- people <19 years old on aspirin therapy
- people with a body mass index ≥ 40

People who are at high risk should do everything possible to avoid getting the flu. This includes getting a flu shot every year by making an appointment at Student Health Services. Flu shots are free.

How is influenza diagnosed?

Most of the time, just talking to your medical provider and having a physical exam is enough. In difficult cases, it may be necessary to have a nasal swab collected to test for the flu virus, or you may need a chest x-ray to make sure you don't have pneumonia.

How do I treat the flu?

Most people recover on their own within 7-10 days. Influenza is a virus, so antibiotics don't help unless you've developed a sinus infection or pneumonia as a complication. People at special risk (see above) may need to take an anti-viral medication called Tamiflu. It doesn't treat the illness, but it does reduce the risk of developing complications from the flu. Every one can:



DO THIS

- Take any medicine prescribed to you, exactly as instructed
- Wash your hands frequently
- Cover your mouth and nose with your elbow when you cough or sneeze
- Use ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve), or acetaminophen (Tylenol) to reduce pain and fever
- Rest as much as possible
- Stay in your room, except for using the rest room. Have friends bring you food.
- Sip water frequently

DO NOT

- Go to class until your temperature is <100°F for 24 hours, and you haven't taken any medicine for your fever
- Take aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid, ASA) (it can cause Reye's Syndrome)

Since I can't go to classes until my fever is gone for 24 hours, what should I do to notify my professors?

Send your professors an e-mail explaining why you are out of classes. You may also ask your health care provider to send a message to the Student Success Center(SSC) stating you are ill. The SSC will send an e-mail to each of your professors saying you are ill. While the professors retain the final say on "excuses," this e-mail from an official source may get them to cut you some slack.

What are some warning signs to watch for?

You should seek immediate medical attention if any of the following occur:

- fever over 104°F
- you are getting better, then get worse again
- you are getting progressively worse
- you are not feeling a little better in 5 days
- new pain in the ear, sinuses, or chest
- shortness of breath
- confusion or decreased level of consciousness
- neck stiffness