

## INFLUENZA (FLU) FACT SHEET

### What is flu?

The flu is a contagious viral illness caused by the influenza virus. Humans are usually infected with human influenza virus from other humans. Occasionally, humans are infected with an animal influenza virus.

### What are the symptoms of flu?

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)

Some people can also have vomiting and diarrhea. Symptoms start 1 to 3 days after being exposed to the virus and may last up to one week or longer. Complications caused by the flu can include: pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, and dehydration. The flu can also make a person's chronic medical conditions (e.g. asthma, heart or lung disease, etc.) worse.

### How common is flu?

Every year in the U.S., the seasonal flu causes thousands of people to need care in a hospital and some die. Flu that occurs every winter season is called the "seasonal flu". In California, flu season usually begins in December and can continue through March.

### Who can get flu?

Anyone can get the flu. Some people are at higher risk of serious health problems when they get sick with the flu. These people include:

- Pregnant women
- Infants
- The elderly
- People with chronic health conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes, heart disease, weak immune system, etc.)

### What is the treatment for flu?

Specific treatment for influenza will be determined by your health care provider. Some things you can do to help with flu symptoms:

- Get plenty of rest
- Drink lots of liquids
- Eat healthy foods

Over the counter pain relievers can help people with the flu feel more comfortable. Children and teens (anyone under 20 years old) sick with the flu should never take aspirin or aspirin-containing medications without consulting a doctor. There are some flu medications available for people at higher risk of serious health problems but they need a doctor's prescription and cannot be bought over the counter.

### **How is flu spread?**

Flu is spread from person to person by direct contact with an infected person or through the air from coughing and sneezing. The incubation period (time between exposure to flu virus and start of illness) is estimated to range from 1 to 4 days with an average of 2 days. Once infected, a person sheds virus during the contagious period, which can start as early as 1 day before symptoms appear and continue for another 5 to 7 days after symptoms start.

### **How is flu prevented?**

The **best way to prevent flu illness is by getting vaccinated**. Influenza vaccination is recommended yearly for everyone 6 months and older. It is safe and effective to receive both flu and COVID vaccine at the same visit.

- Get flu vaccine yearly.
- Wash hands often with soap and warm water.
- Use tissue or upper arm when you cough and sneeze. Dispose of the tissue in a covered trash bin.
- Clean shared items (e.g. phones, keyboards, office equipment, toys, etc.) more often.
- Avoid crowds.
- Avoid people who are sick with respiratory illness.
- Exclude children with respiratory illness from daycare and school.
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after becoming fever free or finishing medication if you are ill with flu or any respiratory illness.

For more information, please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at [cchealth.org/flu/](https://cchealth.org/flu/)

Additional information may be found at the following links:  
[www.cdc.gov/flu/](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/)