

Influenza: Signs, symptoms & complications; Recommendations for prevention

Signs, symptoms & complications

Influenza, also known as flu, spreads easily. Typically, it is transmitted through the air by coughs or sneezes. The virus is also found on the hands of people with influenza and on surfaces they have touched. People can spread influenza beginning from one day before symptoms appear until five to seven days after.

Signs and symptoms

Influenza is an illness of the nose, throat and lungs caused by influenza viruses. Symptoms usually include:

- fever
- chills
- cough
- headache
- muscle aches
- tiredness.

Some children with influenza will vomit or have diarrhoea.

Influenza can range from a mild to a very serious or even fatal disease, and influenza seasons can also vary in severity from one year to another. Complications from influenza include:

- pneumonia (lung infection)
- dehydration
- worsening of long-term medical conditions, such as lung and heart diseases, asthma and diabetes.

People with serious complications from influenza often need care in the hospital. Hospitalization rates are higher for children with long-term medical conditions, babies and children younger than two years, as well as the elderly.

Because different influenza viruses circulate each year, the influenza vaccine's composition changes annually to protect against the viruses expected to be most common.

For this reason, it is important to get the influenza vaccine on an annual basis.

Recommendations for prevention

Vaccines against influenza have been used for over 60 years. They are considered safe and are the best intervention available for preventing influenza-related morbidity and mortality.

Influenza vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of serious influenza complications and for people who live with or care for high risk individuals.

WHO recommends annual vaccination for:

- *nursing-home residents (the elderly or disabled)*
- *elderly individuals*
- *people with chronic medical conditions >6 months*
- *other groups such as pregnant women, health care workers, those with essential functions in society, as well as children from ages 6 months to 2 years.*

