

Information about Seasonal Influenza ('Flu) for Patients, Relatives and Carers

What is seasonal influenza?

Seasonal influenza, commonly called the flu, is a respiratory illness caused by infection by the influenza virus. It is highly contagious and is very easily spread from person to person. The spread of infection is easiest in places where people are in close proximity for reasonable amounts of time such as residential care homes, schools, hospitals and workplaces.

What are the symptoms of flu?

- High temperature (over 38°C or 100.4°F) or feeling feverish with chills;
- Dry cough;
- Sore throat
- Headache;
- Sore muscles and joints;
- Runny or stuffy nose;
- Feeling very tired;
- Some people may feel sick or be sick and have a loose stool;

Telling the difference between Flu and a cold	
Cold and flu symptoms are similar, but flu tends to be more severe	
Flu	Cold
Appears quickly within a few hours	Appears gradually
Affects more than just your nose and throat	Affects mainly your nose and throat
Makes you feel exhausted and too unwell to carry on as normal	Makes you feel unwell, but you're OK to carry on as normal (for example, go to work)

How does it spread?

The virus is very infectious and easily spreads from one person to another. It spreads by germs from coughs and sneezes which can live on hands and surfaces for up to 48 hours. You may then catch the virus by touching or shaking the hand of an infected person or touching surfaces or objects that have become contaminated with the flu virus and then touching your mouth, eyes, or nose without first washing your hands.

Regular washing of hands with soap and water or using hand sanitiser and the use of disinfectant wipes on surfaces can reduce risks of getting 'flu.

How to reduce the risk of spreading flu:

- Use tissues to trap germs when you cough or sneeze
- Dispose of used tissues as quickly as possible
- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap or hand sanitizer



The flu vaccine reduces the risk of catching flu, as well as spreading it to others. It's more effective to get the vaccine before the start of the flu season.

How long will someone with 'flu be infectious to others?

People are most infectious soon after they develop symptoms. They can continue to spread the virus, for example in coughs and sneezes, for up to five days. People are considered no longer infectious if their symptoms have settled for 24 hours.

Am I infectious if I don't have symptoms?

No. If you do not have symptoms of seasonal flu you are not infectious.

How is Influenza treated?

Influenza is treated by alleviating the symptoms. Sometimes anti-viral medication may be given if this is felt advisable by the doctor. Antibiotics are not normally recommended for flu because they won't relieve your symptoms. It is important to rest and keep hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids, especially children and the elderly.

How to stop a flu outbreak?

Because influenza is easily transmitted, outbreaks can occur and be long lasting and difficult to control. The most effective way to prevent and stop an outbreak in hospital is to isolate affected patients, clean and disinfect contaminated areas and equipment and to institute good hand-washing.

If you are in a bay or ward affected by flu the health care workers may need to assess the infectious risk and, where appropriate will use gloves, aprons and face masks to minimize that risk. If you have flu your nurse or doctor may ask you to wear a face mask to minimize risk of transmission, especially when being moved to another ward or department. They may decide that you need to stay in a room on your own whilst you have the flu to help prevent it spreading to other patients who might be prone to getting a severe infection. We would be grateful if you could ensure that this guidance is followed.

If your visitors have flu symptoms they should not visit hospitals whilst they are ill.

Visiting advice during an Influenza outbreak, please:-

- Do not visit the hospital if you have recently had influenza
- Only visit the hospital if it is absolutely necessary, preferably family members only.
- Go to only one ward at each visiting time.
- Do not routinely bring children under 12 years old in to visit.
- Hands must be washed with warm water and soap or hand sanitizer when visiting our wards.
- Put on gloves, aprons and mask (if you require assistance please ask a staff member) if visiting a room where there is Influenza.

Thank you

NNUH Infection, Prevention and Control Team

