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Health Department

FACTS&details

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## Influenza (Flu)

January 2014

### What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) is a viral infection of the nose, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs. There are different strains of the flu that change annually.

### Who can get influenza?

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people). Serious health problems from influenza can affect people at any age. However, people age 65 and older, people with long-term medical conditions, pregnant women and very young children are more likely to have complications from influenza. Pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections are examples of complications from flu.

### When does influenza occur?

Most often, influenza occurs during the fall and winter months. Illnesses with flu-like symptoms can occur in summer months, but are most often caused by other viruses.

### How is influenza spread?

Influenza is transmitted through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person during coughing and sneezing, and is highly contagious.

### What are the symptoms of influenza?

- Headache
- Fever (greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit)
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Body aches

Intestinal symptoms are uncommon. Most people with the flu are typically sick for a few days, however, some people can develop a more serious illness, such as pneumonia, and may require hospitalization.

### How soon do symptoms appear after contracting influenza and how long is a person contagious?

Typically symptoms appear between one and three days after infection. A person infected with influenza is normally contagious the day before symptoms appear and for up to a week.

### Is there a treatment for influenza?

Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics (like penicillin) won't cure it. There are anti-viral medications doctors may prescribe to decrease the duration of symptoms. These medications must be administered within 48 hours after symptoms begin.

### What should you do if you get influenza?

If you are experiencing cold or flu symptoms that you believe require medical attention, contact your medical provider. Rest, drink plenty of liquids, avoid using alcohol and tobacco, and use aspirin or acetaminophen to reduce fever. Due to the risk of Reye's Syndrome, aspirin and other medications containing salicylate should not be given to children.

### Can influenza be prevented?

Routine immunizations (flu shots) are the most effective way to prevent and control influenza. Because the strains of influenza vary from year to year, it is important to receive a vaccination each year. Those who receive annual vaccinations tend to have milder illness and are less likely to be hospitalized from complications.

The Sedgwick County Health Department also recommends the following steps to help prevent the spread of the flu:

- Wash your hands frequently
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow, not your hands
- Eat healthy foods
- Get plenty of rest
- Stay home when you are ill to avoid spreading the virus.



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### Who should be vaccinated?

Everyone age six months and older should receive the vaccination, unless instructed differently by your physician. A flu vaccination is especially important for the following people:

- Children between six months and five years
- Persons age 65 years and older
- Adults and children with a history of chronic pulmonary (including asthma) or cardiovascular (except isolated hypertension), renal, hepatic, neurological, hematologic or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus)
- Persons who have immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or HIV)
- Women who are or will be pregnant during the influenza season
- Children and adolescents (age six months to 18 years) who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and who might be at risk for experiencing Reye Syndrome after influenza virus infection
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- American Indians/Alaskan Natives
- Persons who are morbidly obese (BMI >40)
- Household contacts and caregivers of children younger than age five and adults over the age of 65, with particular emphasis on contacts of children younger than six months.
- Household contacts and caregivers of persons with medical conditions that put them at higher risk for severe complications from influenza.
- Health care personnel

### Seek medical care if you have any of the following signs or symptoms of severe disease:

- Worsening or significant difficulty breathing

- Not waking up or not interacting
- Feeling faint
- Confusion
- Fever with a rash
- In infants, significantly fewer wet diapers than normal (only one or two per day)
- In adults, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen unrelated to coughing
- Severe or persistent vomiting

### Do I need to go to the emergency room if I am only a little sick?

No. The emergency room should be used for people who are very sick. You should not go to the emergency room if you are only mildly ill. If you go to the emergency room and you are not sick with the flu, you may catch it from people who do have it.

### How long should I stay home if I'm sick?

CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or other necessities. Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol®. You should stay home from work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

### What should I do while I'm sick?

Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from infecting them. If you must leave home, for example to get medical care, wear a facemask if you have one, or cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Wash your hands often to keep from spreading flu to others.

### For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County Health Department Epidemiology Office at 316-660-7392 or visit the Sedgwick County website at [www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org).