

## INFLUENZA

Influenza (the flu) is a viral illness that can occur in children and adults of all ages. It is highly contagious and spreads from person to person through infected respiratory secretions (coughing, sneezing & phlegm)

### **Symptoms:**

- Abrupt onset of fever, headache, muscle aches and fatigue
- Cough and sore throat may also be present
- Fevers may last 2-3 days
- May vary from person to person
- Usually improve over 2-5 days
- Weakness and fatigue may last several weeks

**Diagnosis:** Influenza is usually diagnosed based on the typical symptoms (fever, cough, muscle aches). A viral culture may be taken, usually for community outbreak information.

**Treatment:** Focuses on relieving symptoms, i.e.

- Rest until symptoms resolved
- Get plenty of fluids avoid dehydration
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol & other brands) to relieve symptoms. Aspirin and other medicines that include aspirin should be avoided, especially in individuals under 18.
- Cough suppressants can be used if cough is troublesome.
- Antiviral medications:
  - Best taken within the first 24-36 hours of symptoms
  - Do not eliminate symptoms but may reduce severity of illness
  - Are not necessary for most individuals
  - Widespread use may lead to development of resistance
- Antibiotics are not useful for treating viral illnesses.

**Prevention:** Best prevented by influenza vaccine plus infection control measures such as hand washing.

- New vaccines each year because the influenza virus changes from year to year
- Influenza Vaccine—IM injection
  - Effective in reducing the chance of contracting the flu
  - Recommended in October or November
  - Approved for adults and children
  - Generally well-tolerated
  - Most common side effect is soreness at the injection site.
  - Not for use for individuals with egg allergies
- FluMist—Intranasal spray
  - Effective as injection

- Attenuated live virus cannot cause influenza
- Individuals may notice scratchiness in throat for 12-24 hours
- Not for individuals over 49 years of age
- Not for individuals with egg allergies
- Infection Control
  - Limit face-to-face contact with uninfected individuals
  - Frequent hand washing with soap and water or alcohol-based rubs
  - Cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
  - Dispose of tissues immediately

**How do I know it's the flu and not just a cold?**

- Fever—high (102-104) with flu; rare with a cold
- Headache—prominent with flu; rare with a cold
- General aches & pains—usual, often severe with flu, slight with a cold.
- Fatigue & weakness—2-3 weeks with flu; mild with a cold
- Extreme exhaustion—early & prominent with flu; never with a cold.
- Stuffy nose—sometimes with flu; common with a cold.
- Sore throat—sometimes with flu; common with a cold.
- Chest discomfort, cough—common, may be severe with flu, mild to moderate with a cold.

**For more information contact:**

- UNR Student Health Center (775)784-6598
- Washoe District Health Department Flu Hotline (775) 328-3724
- CDC website [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)

For area clinic locations, dates and times go to [www.co.washoe.nv.us/HEALTH](http://www.co.washoe.nv.us/HEALTH)