

Influenza

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Seasonal Flu

Influenza (or flu) is a seasonal respiratory (lung) infection that causes fever, and a cough or sore throat. In temperate climates, it is most common during the fall and winter months.

The flu is actually a different disease from the common cold. The average adult will get a common cold 2 to 4 times a year, whereas the flu is less common, presents differently, and can be life threatening. In fact, the WHO estimates that 250,000 to 500,000 deaths worldwide are attributable to flu per year, whilst deaths from the common cold is close to zero.

The flu spreads from person-to-person through sneezing, coughing, or touching contaminated surfaces. Symptoms include fever or feeling feverish/chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches and fatigue (tiredness). This differs from the common cold where symptoms include a runny or stuffy nose, and in general are milder than the symptoms of flu.

Seasonal flu viruses can cause mild to severe illness and even death, particularly in some high-risk individuals. Persons at increased risk for severe disease include pregnant women, the very young and very old, immune-compromised people, and people with chronic underlying medical conditions. Seasonal flu viruses evolve continuously, which means that one can get infected multiple times throughout their lives. Therefore, it is important to get a seasonal flu yearly since the components of seasonal flu vaccines are updated always to ensure continued effectiveness of the vaccines.

The UN Medical Directors Influenza Pandemic Guidelines

(https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/UNMD%20Pandemic%20Guidelines_FINAL_2019-03-07_0.pdf) can assist those responsible for public health and medical preparedness in UN offices respond to threats and occurrences of pandemic influenza.

Here are the best ways to protect yourself from the flu:

1. Get a flu vaccine.

- Flu viruses are constantly changing and flu vaccines are updated each season -- you should get a flu vaccination every year to get protected. Everyone ages 6 months and older are recommended to get a flu

vaccine. A common misconception is that a flu shot causes flu illness – that is not true, **the flu vaccine does not cause flu!**

2. Take actions to stop the spread of germs.

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people, and if you are sick, stay home to rest and not come to work at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.
- When sick, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

3. Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them.

- Antibiotics are not effective against the flu. However, if you get the flu, prescription medicine called antiviral drugs can be used to treat flu illness. Antiviral drugs can make illness milder and shorten illness time. They may also prevent serious flu complications (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/complications.htm#complications>) so be sure to take the antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them to you.

To learn more about current Influenza activity in your region, please visit WHO Influenza Update (http://www.who.int/influenza/surveillance_monitoring/updates/en/)

Pandemic Flu

A flu pandemic occurs when a flu virus which was not previously circulating among humans and to which most people do not have immunity to emerges and transmits among humans. These viruses may emerge, circulate and cause large outbreaks outside of the normal influenza season. As the majority of the population has no immunity to these viruses, the proportion of persons in a population getting infected may be quite large. Some pandemics may result in large numbers of severe infections (e.g. 1918 Spanish Flu) while others will result in large numbers of milder infections (e.g. 2009 H1N1 Pandemic Flu). Currently there is no longer a pandemic virus circulating in the world although experts believe that we are due for one soon.

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This page will be updated as new information and guidance become available.

Please email msdpublichealth@un.org (<mailto:msdpublichealth@un.org>) if you have any questions related to this page.

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