

ALLEGAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Office Administration

(269) 673-5411

Bioterrorism Preparedness

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Personal Health

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Communicable Disease

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Environmental Health

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Resource Recovery

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Influenza (flu)

What is influenza (the flu)?

The flu is a serious contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. It spreads in the U.S. each year, starting in the fall and continuing through spring.

How is it spread?

Flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

What are the symptoms?

Unlike a cold, flu symptoms start suddenly. They appear about 1-4 days after a person is exposed to the flu. Symptoms may include:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle or body aches
- headaches
- tiredness
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea; this is more common in children

How long is the person contagious?

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days **after** becoming sick. Some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

Is there treatment?

The flu can be treated with antiviral drugs if started soon after you get sick. They will help reduce how sick you get and how long you are ill. Over-the-counter drugs like acetaminophen or ibuprofen may be taken to increase comfort. People with the flu need rest and fluids.

If my child or another family member has been exposed, what should I do? Call your health care provider for advice. Some people with a sick family member may be given an antiviral medicine to help prevent the flu. The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each season. Other important activities for preventing the spread of influenza include frequent hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes.

Who is at higher risk for the flu?

Young children, older adults, and people with weaker immune systems sometimes become sicker from the flu. This is also true if you have certain medical conditions. Having the flu while you are pregnant increases the risk of premature labor and delivery.

What is the best way to prevent flu?

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get the flu shot. Most everyone 6 months of age and older should get the flu vaccine every year. It is important to get the vaccine before the flu season begins, if possible.

Additional Information:

www.cdc.gov/flu

<p>This fact sheet is not intended to replace the advice of your physician. Parents should contact their healthcare provider if they have concerns regarding their child's health. If you have general questions, you may contact an Allegan County Public Health Nurse at 269-673-5411.</p>
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