

INFLUENZA (FLU)

Written by U.S Immigration News
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Influenza is commonly referred to as the Flu, it occurs when the influenza virus affects the respiratory tract (breathing path-nose, throat, wind pipe, lungs). The infection is of particular challenge because of the peculiar changing nature of the virus on a regular basis and because the disease is contagious.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the Flu kills about 36,000 people in the United States every year and is responsible for the hospitalization of another 200,000 people yearly.

Anyone can be infected with the Flu virus though some people are more prone to the infection than others. A vaccine is available for prevention and people should take advantage of it.

What are the signs and symptoms of the Flu?

The Flu is contagious. Infected persons can pass the infection one day before becoming sick and up to five days after becoming sick. It may be difficult to differentiate it from the common cold, however, the peculiarity of the Flu is the suddenness of the onset of symptoms

! Fever (usually high)

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! Stuffy or running nose

! Headache

! Tiredness and feeling unwell

! Cough (usually dry)

! Muscle aches

! Sore throat

! Gastrointestinal symptoms are commoner in children: nausea (feeling of wanting to vomit), vomiting and diarrhea.

! Other symptoms can occur with a complicated Flu case. Pneumonia is one of the complications.

Who is at risk of having the Flu?

As mentioned earlier anyone can have the Flu. Some people at higher risk than the general population are discussed below:

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! If you have a long term disease that affects the heart, lungs (emphysema, obstructive lung disease) or kidneys. Diabetes is also categorized under this group

! Age: Infants, children or anyone 50 years or over.

! Health care workers, including staffs of any health care facility

! People with weak immune systems either from diseases (HIV, cancer) or on medications that weaken the immune system (Chemotherapy, long term steroids, transplant patients).

! People who work closely with infants and children

! Children who are on long term aspirin treatment

! Women who are pregnant in the flu season

What Virus is responsible for the Flu and how is it contacted?

There are three types of influenza viruses A, B, C. Type A causes widely distributed outbreaks (pandemic), type B causes localized outbreaks while type C has not been associated with any major outbreaks.

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Types A and B change their strain frequently by changing part of the protein in the virus (mutation). The change can be gradual overtime (a drift) or sudden change (a shift), hence a newer strain emerges which the body is not accustomed to either by way of vaccination or infection. The body sees the virus as new and has not developed any antibody against it. This is the reason why vaccines are changed yearly to match expected strains for the year.

The Flu is transmitted through tiny infected droplets that form when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets are carried in the air usually within three feet. It can also occur by touching the droplets from an infected person and bringing it in contact with your nose or mouth before any hand washing is done.

When does the Flu occur and when should you be vaccinated?

In the United States the Flu occurs in the winter months but can extend as late as early Spring. Typically from November through March, but it can also occur up till May. So when you have symptoms that appear like cold in the peak of the Flu season, contact your doctor.

Vaccinations should be started in September. It is good to be vaccinated by November, but it is better to get the vaccine as long as the risks of the Flu persist.

What should you do if you suspect you have the Flu?

Drink lots of fluid.

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Rest.

Take pain medications if in pain. Do not give aspirin to children suffering from the Flu.

Contact your doctor.

The Flu is a viral infection; therefore, antibiotics are not used for its treatment. Certain prescription antiviral medications are helpful if started within 2days of the illness. It helps to reduce the duration of the infection.

Who may not receive the Flu vaccine?

! Anyone with allergy to eggs.

! History of previous allergy to the vaccine.

! If you have an active infection it is better to postpone vaccination.

Take Home Message

The Flu is a viral infection and cannot be cured with antibiotics.

Vaccination is the best prevention method. Though it is not hundred percent protective, it reduces the severity of the disease if it happens despite vaccination.

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The Flu is responsible for about 36,000 deaths yearly. Get vaccinated to reduce the number.

You do not need any medical insurance to get the Flu vaccine. It is available especially in big pharmacies.

Dr. Oluwatoyosi Dairo can be contacted at **Amazing Medical Services P.C. at 110-16 Sutphin Blvd., Jamaica, NY 11435 or by phone at (718) 526-7600.**

This article is for educational purposes and it is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor.