

Keep Your Germs to Yourself: Flu Prevention Tips

Influenza (flu) season is here. The Lake County Health Department and Community Health Center has tips on how to prevent flu and what to do if you get the flu:

1. **Get the flu vaccine.** Flu vaccines are your best protection. They protect against three or four strains; type A (H1N1, H3N2) and type B. Everyone 6 months and older should receive a flu vaccine each year.
2. **Follow the 3 Cs of Prevention:**
 - **Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or into your upper arm. Dispose of used tissues. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
 - **Clean:** Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol based hand rub. Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs.
 - **Contain:** If you get sick with flu-like symptoms, stay home until 24 hours after the fever has subsided without fever reducing medications. Limit contact with others as much as possible to prevent spread. Avoid close contact with sick people.
3. **Take flu antivirals as prescribed by your doctor:** Antivirals can treat your flu by shortening illness and making symptoms milder. They work best when used within the first 48 hours of symptoms.

About Influenza

What is the flu? The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.

What are the symptoms? Sudden onset of fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some can have vomiting and diarrhea, especially children. Some people have respiratory symptoms without fever.

How is it spread? Flu viruses spread mainly by tiny droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths/noses of others. A person can also get the flu if they touch a surface/object containing flu germs and then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth.

How long am I contagious? From 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days after illness begins. Small children and people with weakened immune systems may be contagious longer.

Onset of symptoms: The time from when a person is exposed to flu virus and infected to when symptoms begin is from 1 to 4 days, with an average of about 2 days.

Complications can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections and worsening of chronic medical conditions (asthma, diabetes, congestive heart failure).

Who is at risk? Anyone can get the flu, even healthy people. Those at high risk of complications include people 65 years and older, those with chronic medical conditions (any age), pregnant women, young children, immunosuppressed, children under 19 years on chronic aspirin therapy, and those with extreme obesity (BMI \geq 40).