

# Influenza – Flu

Influenza, often called the flu, is an acute infection of the upper airway caused by an influenza A or B virus. Influenza spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing or face-to-face contact. The virus can also spread when a person touches tiny droplets from a cough or a sneeze on another person or object and then touches their own eyes, mouth, or nose before washing their hands.

An infected person can spread the influenza virus even before feeling sick. An adult can spread the virus from about 1 day before to 5 days after symptoms start. Young children may be able to spread the virus for a longer period.

Getting sick with influenza also puts you at risk of other infections. These include viral or bacterial pneumonia which affect the lungs. The risk of complications can be life-threatening. Seniors 65 years and older, young children (especially age 12 months and younger), people who have lung or heart diseases, certain chronic health conditions or weakened immune systems are at greater risk.

Healthy pregnant women in the second half of pregnancy are at greater risk of hospitalization following an influenza virus infection.

In Canada, every year thousands of people are hospitalized and may die from influenza and its complications during years with widespread influenza activity.



## What to Expect

The symptoms of influenza can begin about 1 to 4 days, or an average of 2 days, after a person is first exposed to the virus. Fever and other symptoms usually last up to 7 to 10 days, but the cough and weakness may last 1 to 2 weeks longer.



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### Recommended Follow-Up

- Follow up in \_\_ days.

Name of Provider

Reason

Date/Time

Location

Contact Info

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Symptoms of an influenza infection tend to be worse than with other viruses and include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Runny nose
- Sore throat
- Extreme tiredness
- Cough
- Children may also experience nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea

Treatments for influenza are aimed at symptom relief, but do not shorten or cure the flu.

Antibiotics only work for **bacterial** infections, **NOT** viral infections.

It is **normal** for your mucus to become yellow or green as your flu progresses and does not mean you need antibiotics.



## When to Get Help

Go to the nearest Emergency Department or Urgent Care Centre if you have:

- Chest pain.
- Persistently high fever (over 39.4°C) that is not coming down with acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g., Advil®, Motrin®).
- Persistent or increasing shortness of breath.
- Severe headache, neck pain or stiffness.
- Dizziness when standing, weakness, confusion or constant lack of energy or low urine output.
- Your symptoms worsen despite a reasonable amount of rest and medications.
- Chest or stomach/abdominal pain that is not going away.

**See your healthcare provider, go to a walk-in clinic, or call 811 (711 for the hearing impaired) if you:**

- Cough up thick gray or bloody sputum/phlegm.
- Have pain in your sinuses or an earache.
- Develop MILD shortness of breath.
- A fever that lasts over 5 days.
- Worsening symptoms after a few days of getting better.
- Do not start to get better after 2 weeks.
- Have worsening asthma with viral infections.
- Have a condition that puts you at high risk of complications such as age over 70 years or under 1 year, conditions that suppress your immune system like diabetes, cancer, chemotherapy/radiotherapy, heart, and lung diseases.
- Experience chest or stomach/abdominal pain that is not going away.

**To Learn More:**

- Ask your health care provider.
- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca).



## How to Care for Yourself at Home

### **Rest and Remedies**

- Get plenty of sleep. Adjust sleeping position to prop your head up with pillows to help the mucus clear.
- Drink a lot of fluids (8 glasses a day) such as water and fruit juice. Warm fluids such as tea and soups can also sooth your symptoms. Adding honey can also relieve sore throats and coughs.
- Use a cool-mist humidifier (vaporizer) to increase air moisture to ease breathing.
- Breathe some steamy air but **NOT** hot steam directly which can damage your nasal passages. A hot shower or from a sink filled with hot water to help clear a stuffy nose. Nasal sprays and decongestants may help.

## Influenza/Flu Discharge Instructions - continued

- Anti-influenza drugs or antivirals are available by prescription, but they work best if started within 48 hours of your symptoms beginning.
- Non-prescription cough and cold medications are available for relief of influenza symptoms but are not recommended for children under 6 years old.
- Gargling with salted water can clear mucus and soothe sore throats: mix ½ teaspoon salt in 8 ounces of warm water.
- Limit smoking or vaping.
- Eat a healthy diet to support your immune system: high in fresh fruits (e.g., berries, citrus fruits) and vegetables (e.g., leafy greens, peppers, carrots).
- Take vitamin C supplements. Ask your pharmacist for information.
- Use saline nose drops or sprays.

## Medication

Start by taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever, aches, and sweats if no allergies. Ibuprofen is not recommended for children under 6 months of age.



ASA (Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to risk of Reye's Syndrome

Check the bottle of the medication you have purchased for instructions, but we suggest:

### ACETAMINOPHEN (E.G., TYLENOL®, PARACETAMOL)

- 500-1000 mg every 4-6 hours as needed while awake, with water (max: 4000mg/day).

If you have liver disease or drink over 3 alcoholic beverages per day:

- Maximum dose: 3000mg per day.
- Do not use this medicine for longer than 5-7 days. Speak to your primary care provider if you need to use this for longer.

Be careful not to exceed the maximum dose when taking this medication with other medication that contain acetaminophen (e.g., Dayquil/Nyquil®).

## Notes:

## Influenza/Flu Discharge Instructions - continued

## Notes:

### IBUPROFEN (E.G. ADVIL<sup>®</sup>, MOTRIN<sup>®</sup>)

- 200-400 mg every 6-8 hours as needed while awake, taken with a small snack (Max: 1200mg/day).
- Avoid taking this medication for longer than 5-7 days. See your primary care provider if you need to use this for longer.
- Avoid this medication if you are over 65, pregnant, or have the following conditions: severe liver or kidney disease, peptic ulcer disease or heart failure. Speak to your primary care provider before taking this if you have a history of stroke, GERD, inflammatory bowel disease, liver cirrhosis, or ischemic vascular disease.
- Do not take this with other NSAID medications, such as naproxen (e.g., Aleve<sup>®</sup>) or celecoxib (e.g., Celebrex<sup>®</sup>).

### OTHER OVER-THE-COUNTER COLD REMEDIES

Consult your pharmacist or healthcare provider before to taking any additional medication, particularly, if you are taking several medications or have underlying medical conditions. These medications have unclear benefits and can cause additional side effects (e.g., heart strain, drowsiness, etc.).

Including, but not limited to:

- Antihistamines (e.g., Reactine<sup>®</sup>, Benadryl<sup>®</sup>)
- Decongestants (e.g., Otrivin<sup>®</sup>, Dristan<sup>®</sup>)
- Cough Syrups (e.g., Buckleys<sup>®</sup>)
- Nasal Corticosteroids (e.g., Flonase<sup>®</sup>, Nasacort<sup>®</sup>)

### Prevention

Influenza is often transmitted via touching hands, touching a surface, sneezing, or coughing.

Here are some preventative measures you can take:

- Avoid close contact with people who have the flu.
- Use face masks when sick or around sick contacts.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth, and eyes.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you blow your nose. Use hand sanitizer when away from a sink.
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Promptly disposing of used tissues.
- Sneeze and cough into your elbow or a tissue, away from others.

## Influenza/Flu Discharge Instructions - continued

- Stay home when you are ill, isolate from others at home, and wear a mask, if possible.
- **DO NOT** share food and drinks.
- Get an influenza vaccine each year to prevent you from getting sick with influenza and from spreading it to others.

### Is It The Flu or A Cold?

Symptoms	Cold	Influenza
Fever	Rare	Usual, sudden onset 39 to 40°C (102.2 to 104°F), lasts up to 3 to 4 days
Headache	Rare	Usual, can be severe
Aches and pains	Sometimes mild	Usual, often severe
Fatigue and weakness	Sometimes mild	Usual, may last 2 to 3 weeks or more
Extreme fatigue	Unusual	Usual, early onset, can be severe
Runny, stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, coughing	Sometimes mild to moderate	Usual, can be severe
Complications	Can lead to sinus congestion or earache	Can lead to pneumonia, respiratory failure, and more complications in persons with chronic diseases
Prevention	Frequent hand washing	Yearly influenza vaccine and frequent hand washing
Treatment	No specific treatment is available; symptom relief only	Antiviral drugs by prescription, which can reduce symptoms

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[https://emergencycarebc.ca/clinical\\_resource/patient-information-sheet/colds/](https://emergencycarebc.ca/clinical_resource/patient-information-sheet/colds/)

## Additional Information

- For more information on handwashing: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/hand-washing-help-stop-spread-germs>
- For more information on influenza:
  - Why seniors should get the inactivated influenza vaccine <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/why-seniors-should-get-inactivated-influenza-flu-vaccine>
  - Inactivated influenza vaccines <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/test-s-treatments-medications/medications/immunization-inactivated-influenza>
  - Influenza (flu) immunization: Myths and facts <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/influenza-flu-immunization-myths-and-facts>
- BC Centre for Disease Control's influenza information: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/influenza>

### Tell Us What You Think!

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The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team. This information does not replace the advice given to you by your health care provider.

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