



## Hawaii State Department of Health

### Disease Investigation Branch

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## Influenza

(Flu)

### What is the Flu?

The flu is a contagious respiratory (lung) illness caused by influenza viruses.

### How do you get it?

The flu spreads from person-to-person in droplets from coughing or sneezing. It may also be spread by touching something with the virus on it and then touching your mouth or nose.

### What are the symptoms of flu?

The flu can start with many symptoms at once, including fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and body aches. Children may also have vomiting and diarrhea. Complications of the flu include pneumonia (lung infection), dehydration (excess loss of water from the body), and worsening of chronic medical problems, such as heart problems, asthma or diabetes.

### When do symptoms start?

Flu symptoms usually begin 1 to 3 days after exposure to the virus.

### For how long is a person with the flu contagious?

You may be able to infect others one day before symptoms begin, and up to 7 days after getting sick. This means you can spread the flu before you know you are sick.

### What is the treatment for the flu?

Your doctor can prescribe antivirals (medicines to fight viruses) to treat severe cases of flu or cases with high risk of complications. These medications should be started within 2 days of the beginning of the illness.

Most cases of the flu can be treated with plenty of rest and drinking lots of liquids. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (Advil) can be given for fever and pain. Aspirin should never be given to children or teenagers with flu-like symptoms.

### Should a person with the flu stay away from work or school?

Yes. Because flu is very contagious, it is important to stay away from others until you are feeling better.

### How can you keep from getting the flu?

The best way to prevent flu is for people to get a flu vaccination each fall. People at high risk for complications of flu (people 65 years and older, people 6 months and older with chronic medical problems, children 6 to 23 months of age, pregnant women, and people in nursing homes) are especially encouraged to get a yearly vaccine. There are two types of flu vaccines:

- The flu shot is given with a needle and is for people 6 months and older, including healthy people and those with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal spray flu vaccine is for healthy people 2 to 49 years of age who are not pregnant and do not have certain health conditions.

Try not to have close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, stay away from others to protect them from getting sick, too.

Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.

Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you cannot use soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth to prevent the spread of the virus.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>