

Influenza

Fact Sheet

What is Influenza?

Influenza (or “the flu”) is a highly contagious virus that affects mainly the upper respiratory tract – the nose, throat and lungs. Symptoms can include:

- High fever
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Non-productive cough
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Severe tiredness.
- Young children sometimes show symptoms of diarrhoea, nausea, and vomiting, but this is uncommon.

Most people recover within one to two weeks without requiring any medical treatment.

Doctors diagnose an ‘influenza-like’ illness based on a person’s signs and symptoms. If symptoms are severe diagnosis can be confirmed by a blood test or nose and throat swab.

Treatment for Influenza

Your doctor may prescribe medications to treat your fever, headache, and muscle pain along with lots of rest and fluid. In severe cases the doctor may prescribe specific anti-viral medications to assist in reducing the severity and the duration of your illness. However, to be effective, these medications must be given within two days of your symptoms starting and are only available with a prescription.

It is important to remember that antibiotics are not effective against the influenza virus as they are designed to kill bacteria and not viruses.

In Australia, influenza vaccination is given free to certain high-risk groups of people.

Who is at risk from Influenza infections?

Anyone can get influenza; however, the higher risk groups for developing complications after influenza infection are:

- Babies and young children.
- The elderly
- Anyone with a low immunity.
- People with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, lung disease & cancer.

How can Influenza be spread?

The influenza virus is easily passed from person to person from an infected person through coughing or sneezing directly onto another person. Or on a person’s contaminated hands after touching an infected person or after touching a contaminated surface or item. It then takes between 1 and 4 days for symptoms to develop. Someone suffering from influenza can be infectious from the day before they develop symptoms until seven days afterwards.

How will my care change whilst in hospital?

It is important that you use good respiratory and hand hygiene practices to prevent further spread of infection, both in the hospital and at home. Cover your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze.

Dispose of all used tissues in the garbage bin immediately after use and wash your hands after coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose and before touching other people or common objects e.g., shaking hands, using the telephone.

A sign is placed outside your door to alert hospital staff for the need to use special protective infection control precautions. This sign also alerts visitors of the need to speak with nursing staff prior to entering your room.

The hospital staff will wear protective apparel such as a mask, goggles or eye shield, gloves and an apron or gown when they enter your room.

Influenza

Fact Sheet

You will be allocated a private room. We ask that you restrict your movement to within your room only until 7 days after the onset of your symptoms. If you need to leave your room for medical tests, you will be provided with a mask which you will be asked to wear until you are returned to your room.

Good Hand Hygiene Practices

Hand Hygiene is the most effective way to prevent **ALL** infections, including the flu and the common cold. Encourage your family and friends to maintain good hand hygiene practices every day. Please refer to the hand hygiene information in the patient information booklet or hand hygiene leaflet available from the Infection prevention and control team.

During your stay in hospital you may have seen the staff using an alcohol-based hand rub, as an alternative to soap and water. Alcohol-based hand rubs or gels can be used for hand hygiene as long as your hands are not visibly soiled / dirty. There are a variety of brands on the market and are available for purchase at most pharmacies. You may choose to use this type of product at home.

Can I still have visitors?

Yes – But visitors who **SHOULD NOT** come to see you are young children, newborn babies or anyone who may have a lowered immunity. If you are unsure about having contact with your family and friends during your infectious stage, please speak to your doctor or ask to speak with the infection control nurse.

Whilst you are infectious, your visitors will be asked to wear a mask to protect them from infection; they may also be required to wear gloves and an apron if they are assisting you with care. The nursing staff will direct your visitors in applying these items.

The nursing staff will educate your visitors on the need to perform hand hygiene before entering your room and when they leave your room. We would appreciate it if you would also encourage your visitors to perform this hand hygiene, as this is the most effective way to prevent any infection.

What happens when I go home?

When you return home, it is important for you, your family, and your friends to continue the good hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene practices.

During your illness if you need to attend a hospital emergency department or your GP, notify the receptionist of your illness (call ahead if possible), and ask the receptionist to supply you with a face mask and sit away from other people.

Do not return to work or school but rather, stay at home until you are completely recovered.

It is important that anyone assisting you with close personal care wears gloves if they are going to be in contact with any respiratory secretions (including used tissues), wounds, blood, urine, or faeces. They must wash their hands well, after removing their gloves and disposing of the gloves immediately in the rubbish bin.

Where can I get further information?

You can talk to your doctor or the nursing staff. If you wish to speak with the Infection Control Department, ask your nurse to contact us. Our office hours are 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Our contact numbers are (02) 9480 9433 or (02) 9480 9732.

Alternatively contact your Local Public Health Unit 1300 066 055

Influenza

Fact Sheet

References

NSW Dept of Health; Communicable Diseases
Factsheets – Influenza (29 April 2021)

NSW Dept of Health; Infection Prevention and Control
Policy PD2017_013

National Health and Medical Research Council;
Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of
Infection in Healthcare (2019)

Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation
(ATAGI). Australian Immunisation Handbook, Australian
Government Department of Health, Canberra, 2018,
www.immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au