Influenza Facts

Flu (*influenza*) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. While most healthy people recover from the flu without specific treatment and without complications, older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions are at higher risk for serious complications from the flu, including death.

CAUSES

- The flu virus is spread from person to person by respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing.
- A person can also become infected by touching an object or surface with a virus on it and then touching their mouth, eye or nose.
- Adults may be able to infect others from 1 day before symptoms occur and up to 7 days after getting sick. So it is possible to give someone the flu even before you know you are sick and continue to infect others while you are sick.

SYMPTOMS

- Fever (usually high).
- Headache.
- Tiredness (can be extreme).
- Cough.
- Sore throat.
- Runny or stuffy nose.
- Body aches.
- Diarrhea and vomiting may also occur, particularly in children.
- These symptoms are referred to as “flu-like symptoms”. A lot of different illnesses, including the common cold, can have similar symptoms.

DIAGNOSIS

- There are tests that can determine if you have the flu as long you are tested within the first 2 or 3 days of illness.
- A doctor's exam and additional tests may be needed to identify if you have a disease that is a complicating the flu.

RISKS AND COMPLICATIONS

Some of the complications caused by the flu include:

- Bacterial pneumonia or progressive pneumonia caused by the flu virus.
- Loss of body fluids (*dehydration*).
- Worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.
- Sinus problems and ear infections.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Seek medical care early on.
- If you are at high risk from complications of the flu, consult your health-care provider as soon as you develop flu-like symptoms. Those at high risk for complications include:
  - People 65 years or older.
  - People with chronic medical conditions, including diabetes.
  - Pregnant women.
  - Young children.
- Your caregiver may recommend use of an antiviral medication to help treat the flu.
- If you get the flu, get plenty of rest, drink a lot of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco.
- You can take over-the-counter medications to relieve the symptoms of the flu if your caregiver approves. **(Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever)**.

PREVENTION

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each fall. Other measures that can help protect

against the flu are:

- Antiviral Medications
  - A number of antiviral drugs are approved for use in preventing the flu. These are prescription medications, and a doctor should be consulted before they are used.
- Habits for Good Health
  - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, throw the tissue away after you use it.
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
  - Avoid people who are sick.
  - If you get the flu, stay home from work or school. Avoid contact with other people so that you do not make them sick, too.
  - Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth as germs ore often spread this way.

IN CHILDREN, EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS THAT NEED URGENT MEDICAL ATTENTION:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing.
- Bluish skin color.
- Not drinking enough fluids.
- Not waking up or not interacting.
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held.
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.
- Fever with a rash.

IN ADULTS, EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS THAT NEED URGENT MEDICAL ATTENTION:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen.
- Sudden dizziness.
- Confusion.
- Severe or persistent vomiting.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

You or someone you know is experiencing any of the symptoms above. When you arrive at the emergency center, tell the reception staff that you think you have the flu. You may be asked to wear a mask and/or sit in a secluded area to protect others from getting sick.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Monitor your condition.
- Seek medical care if you are getting worse, or not improving.

Information courtesy of the CDC.

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