

All About the Flu: What is the Flu

The flu (also called influenza) is a highly contagious infection of the respiratory system (the nose, throat and lungs). The symptoms of the flu are high fever (over 100°F), cough, sore throat, a stuffy or runny nose, muscle pain, and weakness.

Every year millions of people around the world get the flu. About 5%-20% of the population gets the flu each year.

Most people who get the flu feel sick for about a week before they recover fully, but thousands of people die each year from the flu. The people most at risk are the very, very young and the very, very old. Some epidemics are worse than others because some viruses affect people more.

All About the Flu

Name _____

All About the Flu: How the Flu Spreads

The flu, like a cold, spreads easily from person to person by coughing and sneezing.

The virus spreads through the air and onto surfaces when virus-containing droplets are expelled by the sneezes and coughs of infected people. Also, if infected people sneeze or cough into their hands and then touch an item (like a doorknob), viruses remain on that item for a while. Others who later touch that item can get the virus on their hand, and if they touch their mouth, nose or eyes, the virus can enter their body and they can get sick.

All About the Flu: The Incubation Period

Once you are exposed to a flu virus, the virus may invade a cell in your respiratory system. If it gets inside a cell it multiplies quickly, cloning itself many times, meanwhile damaging the host cell. The newly-made viruses leave the damaged cell and invade other cells. This process continues and the virus spreads quickly.

It can take two or more days for the virus to reproduce enough to do enough damage to cause symptoms to appear. This time period is called the incubation period.

During the incubation period you do not feel sick yet, but you can spread the virus to others.

All About the Flu: How to Avoid the Flu

To reduce the risk of getting or spreading the flu, do the following:

Wash your hands often. Use soap and water, and wash for at least 20 seconds (this is the time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice).

When you can't wash your hands, use an alcohol-based sanitizer.

Keep your hands away from your mouth, nose and eyes.

Cover your sneezes and coughs with a tissue or the inside of your elbow. Do not use your hands.

Do not go to school if you are sick.

All About the Flu: Recovery

Most people recover from the flu when their immune system kills the invading virus.

There are also flu vaccines that help protect people from a specific strain of the flu. The flu virus mutates all the time, so new vaccines are required for different strains of the flu.



See your doctor for advice about vaccinations and about treating the flu.

All About the Flu: Glossary

contagious - able to spread from person.
epidemic - an outbreak of a disease that spreads very quickly.

immune system - cells in your body that protect you from infections.

incubation period - the time between being infected and showing symptoms.

influenza - the flu

respiratory system - the breathing system of the body -- the lungs and airways.

strain - a particular type of an organism.

symptom - an abnormal functioning of the body that indicates that you have an illness.

vaccine - a medical preparation that gives immunity to a disease.

virus - a type of simple microorganism that needs a host to reproduce.

All About the Flu: Questions

1. What is another word for flu? _____
2. What are two flu symptoms? _____
_____ & _____
3. What are two ways to protect yourself from the flu? _____
_____ & _____
4. Where do viruses multiply? _____
5. Have you ever had the flu? _____