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Health Department

FACTS&details

about Sedgwick County Government

September 2011

## Influenza (Flu)

### What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) is a viral infection of the nose, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs. There are different strains of the flu that change annually.

### Who can get influenza?

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people). Serious health problems from influenza can affect people at any age. However, people age 50 and older, people with chronic medical conditions, and very young children are more likely to have complications from influenza. Pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections are examples of complications from flu.

### When does influenza occur?

Most often, influenza occurs during the fall and winter months. Illnesses with flu-like symptoms can occur in summer months, but are most often caused by other viruses.

### How is influenza spread?

Influenza is transmitted through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person during coughing and sneezing, and is highly contagious.

### What are the symptoms of influenza?

- Headache
- Fever
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Body aches

Intestinal symptoms are uncommon. Most people with the flu are typically sick for a few days; however, some people can develop a more serious illness, such as pneumonia, and may require hospitalization.

### How soon do symptoms appear after contracting influenza and how long is a person contagious?

Typically symptoms appear between one to three days after infection. A person infected with influenza is normally contagious the day before symptoms appear and can last up to a week.

### Is there a treatment for influenza?

Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics (like penicillin) won't cure it. There are prescription and anti-viral drugs that doctors may prescribe to decrease the duration of symptoms. These medications do not decrease the serious complications of influenza and they must be administered within 48 hours of the onset of the illness.

### What should you do if you get influenza?

If you are experiencing cold or flu symptoms that you believe require medical attention, contact your medical provider. Rest, drink plenty of liquids, avoid using alcohol and tobacco, and use aspirin or acetaminophen to reduce fever. Due to the risk of Reye's Syndrome, aspirin and other medications containing salicylate should not be given to children.

### **For more information:**

Sedgwick County Health Department

660-7300

[www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org)



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### Can influenza be prevented?

Routine immunizations (flu shots) are the most effective way to prevent and control influenza. Because the strains of influenza vary from year to year, it is important to receive a vaccination each year. Those who receive annual vaccinations tend to have milder illness and are less likely to be hospitalized from complications.

The Sedgwick County Health Department also recommends the following steps to help prevent the spread of the flu:

- Wash hands frequently
- Cover your mouth when you cough and sneeze
- Eat healthy foods
- Get plenty of rest
- Stay home when you are ill to avoid spreading the virus.

### How effective is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is usually around 80 percent effective in preventing illness from the influenza virus. This means that it is possible to get influenza after having the vaccine, but even when illness occurs, symptoms are usually less severe and complications are less frequent.

### Who should be vaccinated?

All persons age 6 months and older should receive the vaccination. Individuals at a higher risk of serious complications from influenza include:

- All persons age 6 months to 4 years
- Persons age 50 years and older

- Adults and children with a history of chronic pulmonary (including asthma) or cardiovascular (except isolated hypertension), renal, hepatic, neurological, hematologic or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus)
- Persons who have immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or HIV)
- Women who are or will be pregnant during the influenza season
- Children and adolescents (age 6 months to 18 years) who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and who might be at risk for experiencing Reye Syndrome after influenza virus infection
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- American Indians/Alaskan Natives
- Persons who are morbidly obese (BMI >40)
- Household contacts and caregivers of children younger than age 5 and adults over the age of 50, with particular emphasis on contacts of children younger than 6 months.
- Household contacts and caregivers of persons with medical conditions that put them at higher risk for severe complications from influenza.

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