



Sedgwick County...  
working for you

Health Department

September 2009

FACTS&details

about Sedgwick County Government

## 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 yearly.

### Who can get influenza?

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

### When does influenza occur?

Most often, influenza occurs during the 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. Influenza is highly contagious.

### What are the symptoms of influenza?

Most often influenza symptoms include:

- 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.

### For more information:

Sedgwick County Health Department  
660-7300

Sedgwick County Website  
[www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org)

For the latest updates on influenza in Kansas, visit the Kansas Influenza information website <http://www.kdhe.state.ks.us/flu/index.html>

### 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) don't work to 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.



## Influenza (Flu) - page 2

### Is there a way to prevent influenza?

Routine immunizations (flu shots) are the most effective way to 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 this year?

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.

### Is there a shortage of the Flu Vaccine?

Unlike some years in the past, there is no expectation of a flu vaccine shortage this flu season.

### For more information:

Sedgwick County Health Department  
660-7300

Sedgwick County Website  
[www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org)

For the latest updates on influenza in Kansas, visit the Kansas Influenza information website <http://www.kdhe.state.ks.us/flu/index.html>

### Who should get vaccinated?

Anyone who wants to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza or spreading influenza to others. Individuals at a higher risk of serious complications from influenza and all children aged 6 month - 18 years should definitely be vaccinated. Those most at risk include:

- All children 6 months and older
- Pregnant women
- Persons age 50 and older
- Persons living in nursing homes or dormitories
- Persons with certain chronic medical conditions:
  - \* Heart disease
  - \* Asthma
  - \* Diabetes
  - \* Kidney or blood disorders
  - \* Lung disease
  - \* Liver disease
  - \* Anemia
  - \* Muscle/nerve disorders that cause problems with breathing or swallowing
  - \* HIV/AIDs or any condition that weakens the immune system
- Health care workers
- Household contacts who have frequent contact with persons at high risk, and who can transmit influenza to those persons at high risk.