Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

What is influenza?
Influenza is a virus which causes cough or sore throat accompanied by a fever. This virus is spread from person-to-person through saliva and mucus droplets often formed when coughing or sneezing. These droplets can also contaminate surfaces frequently touched, such as doorknobs, doors, and countertops. Sharing items like mobile and laptops can also spread the virus.

Why influenza virus is sometimes called “swine flu”?
This virus was originally referred to as “swine flu” because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in the virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine). The influenza viruses circulating are very much human flu now.

Is the influenza virus contagious?
The influenza virus is contagious and spreads from person to person and from person to surface to person (like through a sick person touching a door and the next person then touching the same door).

How does influenza spread?
Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing, sneezing or talking by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Can I get influenza more than once?
Getting infected with any influenza virus, including influenza A/H1N1 and influenza B, should cause your body to develop immune resistance to that virus so a person would probably not get infected with the identical influenza virus more than once. BUT...influenza changes relatively rapidly so we have to change the vaccine against influenza nearly every year, and sometimes twice a year! This means that you can get influenza more than once.
What are the signs and symptoms of this virus in people?
The symptoms of flu in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. People may be infected with the flu, including influenza A/H1N1 and influenza B, and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

How severe is illness associated with influenza?
Illness with flu has ranged from mild to severe. While most people who have been sick recover without needing medical treatment, hospitalizations and deaths from infection with this virus can occur.

In seasonal flu, certain people are at “high risk” of serious complications. This includes pregnant women, people 65 years and older, children younger than five years old, and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma and kidney disease.

Young children are also at high risk of serious complications from influenza. People 65 and older are also at “high risk” of developing serious complications from their illness.

Who is at higher risk from serious influenza related complications?
Most people who get the flu will have mild illness, will not need medical care or antiviral drugs, and will recover in less than two weeks. Some people, however, are more likely to get flu complications that result in being hospitalized and occasionally result in death.

People at High Risk for Developing Flu-Related Complications:
- Pregnant women
- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- Adults 65 years of age and older

People with chronic medical conditions

People who have medical conditions are also at high risk for complications from influenza. These conditions include:

- Asthma
- Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions [including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy]
(seizure disorders), stroke, intellectual disability (mental retardation), moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury.

- Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
- Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)
- Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)
- Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus)
- Kidney disorders
- Liver disorders
- Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
- Weakened immune system due to disease or medication (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or cancer, or those on chronic steroids)
- People younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy

How long can an infected person spread this virus to others?
People infected with flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. This “infectious period” can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?
A flu vaccine is by far the most important step in protecting against flu infection.
There are also everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like the flu:

- When you sneeze or cough, cover your nose and mouth with either your elbow or your shoulder (aim for the cloth of your shirt)
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
• If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.

What is the best way to keep from spreading the virus through coughing or sneezing?
Keep away from others as much as possible. When you sneeze or cough, cover your nose and mouth with either your elbow or your shoulder (aim for the cloth of your shirt)

Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

If I have a family member at home who is sick with the flu, should I go to work?
Employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home with the flu can go to work as usual. These employees should monitor their health every day, and take everyday precautions including covering their coughs and sneezes and washing their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze.

How to Handwash?

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Use plenty of soap and water or alcohol gel. Rub your hands facing each other, then rub each hand on the back of the other, getting the fingers in between. Then rub the fingertips of one hand on the palm of the other hand (repeat with the other hand), Rub the thumb inside a circle made from the other hand and repeat on the opposite hand. Finally rub the fingernails of one hand on the palm of the other and repeat on the other side.
**What is a fever?**
Fever can be one of the symptoms of a flu-like illness for many people. A fever is an oral temperature of at least 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius). Signs of a fever include chills, a flushed appearance, feeling very warm, or sweating.

**What should I do if I have a fever?**
You may be coming down with the flu. If you don’t have one of the warning signs, you probably should not go to work or school to help prevent spreading the flu to classmates or colleagues. If you have one of the emergency warning signs you should seek medical care right away.

**What are “emergency warning signs” that should signal anyone to seek medical care right away?**

**In children:**
- 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:**
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough
Are there medicines to treat influenza infection?
Yes. There are drugs your doctor may prescribe for treating influenza called “antiviral drugs.” These drugs can make you better faster and may also prevent serious complications. It’s very important that antiviral drugs be used early to treat flu in people who are very sick for example people who are in the hospital) or are at high risk for complications (see one of the earlier questions for the list of risk groups.)