

**Public Health Division**  
**Key Facts about Influenza**  
**(Flu)**  
Fall 2019-2020



**Vaccinate yourself and your family against the flu!**

**What is Influenza (also called Flu)?**

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

**Signs and Symptoms of Flu**

- Fever\* or feeling feverish/chills
- Sore throat, cough, runny or stuffy nose
- Headaches, muscle or body aches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.



*\*It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever. People who have the flu can feel some or all of these signs or symptoms.*

**How Flu Spreads**

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or nose.

**Period of Contagiousness**

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

- People with flu are most contagious in the first 3-4 days after their illness begins.
- Some otherwise healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick.
- Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others with flu viruses for an even longer time.

**Onset of Symptoms & Complications of Flu**

The time from when a person is exposed and infected with flu to when symptoms begin is about 2 days but can range from about 1 to 4 days. Complications can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

**Preventing Flu**

The first and most important step in **preventing flu** is to get a flu vaccination each year. Flu vaccine has been shown to reduce flu related illnesses and the risk of serious flu complications that can result in hospitalization or even death. CDC also recommends everyday preventive actions (like staying away from people who are sick, covering coughs and sneezes and frequent handwashing) to help slow the spread of germs that cause respiratory (nose, throat, and lungs) illnesses, like flu.

**Diagnosing/Treating Flu**

It is very difficult to distinguish flu from other viral or bacterial respiratory illnesses based on symptoms alone. There are tests available to diagnose flu. There are influenza antiviral drugs that can be used to treat flu illness.

**Together let's help keep our communities healthy and free from flu!**

For questions about the flu or flu vaccine, please visit the New Mexico Department of Health Immunization Program website at [www.immunize.org](http://www.immunize.org) or contact your local public health office.

Resource: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>