

From the Health Clinic



Mrs. Maureen Earner (mearner@stambroseschool.org)



What Are the Symptoms of Influenza?

Influenza (also known as the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. The flu is different from a cold. The flu usually comes on suddenly. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose

- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- 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.*

Flu Complications

Most people who get influenza will recover in several days to less than two weeks, but some people will develop complications as a result of the flu. A wide range of complications can be caused by influenza virus infection of the upper respiratory tract (nasal passages, throat) and lower respiratory tract (lungs). While anyone can get sick with flu and become severely ill, some people are more likely to experience severe flu illness. Young children, adults aged 65 years and older, pregnant women, and people with certain chronic medical conditions are among those groups of people who are at high risk of serious flu complications, possibly requiring hospitalization and sometimes resulting in death. For example, people with chronic lung disease are at higher risk of developing severe pneumonia.

Sinus and ear infections are examples of moderate complications from flu, while pneumonia is a serious flu complication that can result from either influenza virus infection alone or from co-infection of flu virus and bacteria. Other possible serious complications triggered by flu can include inflammation of the heart (myocarditis), brain (encephalitis) or muscle (myositis) tissues, and multi-organ failure (for example, respiratory and kidney failure). Flu virus infection of the respiratory tract can trigger an extreme inflammatory response in the body and can lead to sepsis, the body's life-threatening response to infection. Flu also can make chronic medical problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience

asthma attacks while they have the flu, and people with chronic heart disease may experience a worsening of this condition triggered by flu.

How Does the Flu Spread?

1. **Person to Person** - People with flu can spread it to others up to about 6 feet away. Most experts think that flu viruses are 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 or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. 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 or nose.

To avoid this, people should stay away from sick people and stay home if sick. It also is important to wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub. Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick should not be shared without washing thoroughly first. Eating utensils can be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap and do not need to be cleaned separately. Further, frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at home, work and school, especially if someone is ill.

2. **The Flu Is Contagious** - Most healthy adults may be able to infect other people beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick. Children may pass the virus for longer than 7 days. Symptoms start 1 to 4 days after the virus enters the body. **That means that 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.** Some people can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons may still spread the virus to others.