

## Influenza

### **What is influenza?**

Influenza is a contagious respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses. It can cause substantial illness and death among long-term care facility residents and illness among personnel in long-term care facilities.

### **How is influenza spread?**

Influenza is primarily transmitted from person-to-person through droplets made when people ill with influenza cough and sneeze; these large droplets can then settle on the mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tracts of susceptible persons who are near (e.g., within about six feet) infected persons. Three feet has often been used by infection control professionals to define close contact and is based on studies of respiratory infections; however, for practical purposes, this distance may range up to six feet.

Transmission may also occur through direct contact or indirect contact with respiratory secretions, such as touching surfaces contaminated with influenza virus and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. Adults may be able to spread influenza to others from one day before getting symptoms to approximately five days after symptoms start. Young children and persons with weakened immune systems may be infectious for 10 or more days after onset of symptoms.

### **What are the symptoms of influenza?**

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 (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

### **Are certain people at risk of getting influenza?**

Certain groups of people are at greater risk of getting influenza and further developing influenza related complications, this includes:

- children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- adults 65 years of age and older
- pregnant women
- people who have medical conditions including:
  - asthma
  - neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions (including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerves, and muscles 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 COPD
  - heart disease
  - blood disorders
  - endocrine disorders (such as diabetes)
  - kidney disorders
  - liver disorders

- metabolic disorders
- weakened immune systems due to disease or medication
- people younger than 19 years of age receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- people who are morbidly obese (Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or greater)

**What is the treatment for influenza disease?**

Most healthy individuals who become ill with the influenza virus will recover without complications and do not need to be treated with antiviral drugs. However, treatment with antiviral drugs is recommended for ill persons who fit into a high-risk category for influenza related complications.

**How can influenza be prevented in the healthcare setting?**

Strategies for the prevention and control of influenza in long-term care facilities include the following:

- Annual influenza vaccination of all residents and healthcare personnel (For more information regarding influenza vaccination in long-term care facilities, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/longtermcare.htm>.)
- Implementation of Standard and Droplet Precautions when a person is suspected or confirmed to have influenza (For more information regarding the prevention of infectious agents in healthcare settings, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/2007IP/2007isolationPrecautions.html>.)
- Active surveillance and influenza testing for new illness cases (For more information regarding influenza surveillance in long-term care facilities, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/longtermcare.htm>.)
- Restriction of ill visitors and personnel from entering the facility (For more information regarding the restriction of ill visitors, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/longtermcare.htm>.)
- Administration of influenza antiviral medications for prophylaxis and treatment when influenza is detected in the facility (For more information regarding antiviral use and prophylaxis in long-term care facilities, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/longtermcare.htm>.)
- Other prevention strategies, such as respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette programs (For more information about respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette programs in healthcare settings, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm>.)

For information regarding influenza in the healthcare setting, visit the following resources:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/longtermcare.htm>