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## THE INFLUENZA- A.K.A.- THE FLU

**What is influenza?**

Influenza, commonly called "the Flu," is an illness caused by RNA viruses that infect the respiratory tract of many animals, birds, and humans. In most people, the infection results in the person getting fever, cough, headache, and malaise (tired, no energy); some people also may develop a sore throat, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. The majority of individuals has symptoms for about one to two weeks and then recovers with no problems. However, compared with most other viral respiratory infections, such as the common cold, influenza (Flu) infection can cause a more severe illness with a mortality rate (death rate) of about 0.1% of people who are infected with the virus.

## What are the causes of the Flu? The Flu (influenza) viruses

Influenza viruses cause the Flu and are divided into three types, designated A, B, and C. Influenza types A and Bare responsible for epidemics of respiratory illness that occur almost every winter and are often associated with increased rates of hospitalization and death. Influenza type C differs from types A and B in some important ways. Type C infection usually causes either a very **mild** respiratory illness or no symptoms at all; it does not cause epidemics and does not have the severe public-health impact of influenza types A and B. Efforts to

control the impact of influenza are aimed at types A and B, and the remainder of this discussion will be devoted only to these two types.

Influenza viruses continually change over time, usually by mutation (change in the viral RNA). This constant

changing often enables the virus to evade the immune system of the host (humans, birds, and other animals) so that the host is susceptible to changing influenza virus infections throughout life. This process works as follows: a host infected with influenza virus develops antibodies against that virus; as the virus changes, the "first" antibody no longer recognizes the "newer" virus and infection can occur because the host does not recognize the new Flu virus as a problem until the infection is well under way. The first antibody developed may, in some instances, provide partial protection against infection with a new influenza virus. In 2009, almost all individuals had no antibodies that could recognize the novel HINI virus immediately.

Type A viruses are divided into subtypes or strains based on differences in two viral surface proteins called the hemagglutinin **(H)** and the neuraminidase (N). There are at least 16 known **H** subtypes and nine known N subtypes. These surface proteins can occur in what are the causes of the Flu.

## What are Flu symptoms in adults and in children?

Typical clinical features of influenza may include

* fever (usually 100 F-103 Fin adults and often even higher in children),
* chills,
* respiratory symptoms such as
  + cough (more often in adults),
  + sore throat (more often in adults),
  + runny or stuffy nose (especially in children),
* headache,
* muscle aches,
* fatigue, sometimes extreme.

Although nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea can sometimes accompany influenza infection, especially in children, gastrointestinal symptoms are rarely prominent. The term "stomach Flu" is a misnomer that is sometimes used to describe gastrointestinal illnesses caused by other microorganisms. H l N I infections, however, have caused more nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea than the conventional (seasonal) Flu viruses.

Most people who get the Flu recover completely in one to two weeks, but some people develop serious and potentially life-threatening medical complications, such as pneumonia. In an average year, influenza is associated with about 36,000 deaths nationwide and many more hospitalizations. Flu-related complications can occur at any age; however, the elderly and people with chronic health problems are much more likely to develop serious complications after the conventional influenza infections than are younger, healthier people.

Unfortunately, people may be contagious about 24-48 hours before symptoms appear and, for those people who spontaneously recover, they may shed contagious viruses for about a week.

## Flu prevention:

I. **Flu vaccine**

Most of the illness and death caused by influenza can be prevented by annual influenza vaccination. The CDC's

current Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) issued recommendations for everyone 6 months of age and older, who do not have any contraindications to vaccination, to receive a Flu vaccine each year.

Flu vaccine (influenza vaccine made from inactivated and sometimes attenuated [noninfective] virus) is

specifically recommended for those who are at high risk for developing serious complications as a result of influenza infection.

A new vaccine type, Fluzone Intradermal, was approved by the FDA in 20 II (for adults 18-64 years of age).

This injection goes only into the intradermal area of the skin, not into the muscle (IM) like most conventional Flu shots and uses a much smaller needle than the conventional shots. This killed viral preparation is supposed to be about as effective as the IM shot but claims to produce less pain and fewer side effects. (<http://www.medicinenet.com/influenza/article.htm)>

2. **Exercise**

Many people do not realize that with just a little moderate exercise (45 minutes to an hour) five days a week you can lower your risk of catching a cold by as much as 33%. You may not realize it but just regular walking around your neighborhood at a brisk pace can do wonders to not only strengthen your body but boost your ability to fight off those nasty buggers that can make you sick.

## Get Enough Sleep

Getting adequate rest not only helps to refresh the body and mind but it also helps to lower your level of stress, which can keep your immune system working at its peak. Many medical professionals will tell you that an inadequate amount of sleep can have a very negative impact on your body's immune system. Over the years, as the world has become busier and busier, all of us have had a tendency to sacrifice sleep for other things. The cost we pay for going to bed just a few hours later each night is a weak immune system.

## Wash Your Hands

Most viruses are passed from one person to another through direct contact. People cough into their hands and then either touch you or some other object that will then transfer the virus to you when you touch it. Regular washing of your hands can avoid this type of transmission. Remember, it is not just a matter of using soap and water but also the act or rubbing the soap over your hands, under your fingernails, and over your wrists that will eliminate those cold-causing germs. By making sure that your

hands only come in contact with surfaces that are clean and that you regularly wash away any germs that you may have been exposed to, you'll reduce your chances of catching the cold or Flu.

It's true you may not be able to get a vaccine to keep you from catching the cold or Flu but by applying these very basic cold and Flu prevention strategies, you can significantly lower your risks. No one likes feeling sick and under the weather but records still show that on average Americans are fighting as many as a billion colds each year. It just simply makes sense that rather than fight off a cold after the fact that we teach our immune system to fight it off before we get sick.