

NIH Clinical Center Patient Education Materials

Influenza: Prevention tips for patients and visitors

Influenza

Influenza (flu) is a respiratory virus infection that spreads easily from person to person, usually by coughing, sneezing, or direct contact. There are two main types of flu viruses, A and B. Flu A and B viruses that routinely spread among people (human influenza viruses) cause yearly seasonal flu epidemics. Each year, flu vaccines are designed to protect against these types of flu.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), flu viruses infect an average of 10 to 20 percent of the U.S. population each year. More than 110,000 people are hospitalized because of the flu and its complications. People with weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable to flu. They have a higher risk of severe complications. Flu symptoms include fever, coughing and/or sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches and/or body aches, chills, and fatigue.

How to avoid getting the flu

Hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is the most important way to prevent the spread of germs. Make sure to:

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol hand rub often, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Ask your health care providers and visitors to wash their hands frequently. Avoid crowded areas
- Stay away from anyone with a fever, cold, flu, or other respiratory infections.

Respiratory etiquette

- Cover your mouth and nose with tissues when you cough or sneeze, and put your used tissues in a wastebasket right away.
- If you do not have tissues, cough or sneeze into your inner elbow, not your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Masks

Your health care providers may wear a mask when caring for you to protect you from other possible exposures from patients who have respiratory infections.

Immunization

Patients should speak to their doctor before getting the flu vaccine. Family members and caregivers of people at higher risk for complications from the flu (young children, patients with weakened immune systems, and older adults) should get the flu vaccine. They should not get the nasal spray vaccine, which contains live virus. If you were vaccinated with the nasal spray (Flumist®) do not visit with patients for at least 7 days.

Tips for patients

- If you have flu-like symptoms, contact your doctor immediately.
- If you have had close contact with someone who has flu, tell your doctor.
- If you have a low white blood cell count (neutropenia), wear a mask when you are in crowds or around people with flu symptoms.

Tips for visitors

If you have any flu symptoms, do not come to the NIH Clinical Center or visit patients until your symptoms are completely gone.

This information is prepared specifically for persons taking part in clinical research at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center and may not apply to patients elsewhere. If you have questions about the information presented here, talk to a member of your health care team.

Products/resources named serve as examples and do not imply endorsement by NIH. The fact that a certain product/resource is not named does not imply that such product/resource is unsatisfactory.

National Institutes of Health Clinical Center

Bethesda, MD 20892

11/2015

Questions about the NIH Clinical Center?

<http://www.cc.nih.gov/comments.shtml>

