

## What is the flu?

Influenza, also called the flu, is a respiratory infection caused by a virus. It is a common illness that is like a very bad cold. The symptoms are high fever (over 100 °F), cough, sore throat, stuffy or runny nose, muscle pain, and weakness.

Every year there are flu epidemics that result in millions of people getting the flu. Most people who get the flu feel sick for a week before they recover, but thousands of people die from it. The people most at risk are the very, very young and the very, very old. Some epidemics are much worse than others because the virus that year affects people more.

## How the flu spreads

The flu, like a cold, spreads very easily, through the air and on surfaces, when virus-containing droplets are expelled by the sneezes and coughs of infected people. Also, if infected people sneeze or cough into their hands and then touch an object, viruses remain on that object. Others who later touch that object will get the virus on their hand, and if they touch their mouth, nose or eyes, the virus enters their body and they can get sick. Once you catch the virus, it can take about 2 days for the virus to reproduce enough so that symptoms appear -- this delay is called the incubation period.

## How to limit the spread of the flu and protect yourself

To reduce the risk of getting or spreading the flu, do the following:

- Wash your hands often -- use soap and water, and wash for at least 20 seconds.
- When you can't wash your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, mouth, and nose.
- Do not use your bare hands to cover a sneeze or cough.
- Cover your sneezes and coughs with a tissue, or use the inside of your elbow
- Do not go to school if you are sick!

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## Questions

1. The flu is caused by a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Two symptoms of the flu are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The flu spreads through the air and on \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The incubation period of the flu is about \_\_\_\_\_.
5. When you sneeze, should you cover it with your bare hands? \_\_\_\_\_