

# Influenza

## **What is influenza?**

Influenza (flu) is a viral infection of the nose, throat, trachea, and bronchi that occurs in epidemics every 3 or 4 years (for example, Asian influenza). The main symptoms are a stuffy nose, sore throat, and nagging cough. There may be more muscle pain, headache, fever, and chills than colds usually cause. For most people, influenza is just a bad cold and bed rest is not necessary. The dangers of influenza for healthy people are overrated.

## **How can I take care of myself?**

The treatment of influenza depends on your main symptoms and is no different from the treatment for other viral respiratory infections. Bed rest is not necessary.

- Fever or aches: Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) every 6 hours or ibuprofen (Advil) every 8 hours for fever over 102 F (39 C). Do not take aspirin because it may cause Reye's syndrome.
- Cough or hoarseness: Use cough drops.
- Sore throat: Suck on hard candy. Warm chicken broth may also help.
- Stuffy nose: Warm-water or saline nosedrops and nose blowing will open most blocked noses.
- Contagiousness: Spread is rapid because the incubation period is only 24 to 36 hours and the virus is very contagious. You may return to school after the fever is gone and you feel up to it.

## **How can I prevent influenza?**

The influenza vaccine gives protection for only 1 or 2 years. In addition, the vaccine itself can cause fever in 20% of the people who get the shots and a sore injection site in 10%. Therefore, the vaccine is not recommended for healthy people (unless an especially severe form of influenza comes along). Only those with chronic diseases (for example, asthma) need to come in for yearly influenza boosters. Talk with your physician or parents if you think you should have flu shots.

## **When should I call my health care provider?**

Call during office hours if:

- You develop any complications such as an earache, sinus pain or pressure, or a fever lasting over 3 days.

You have other questions or concerns.