

INFLUENZA

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

5.3

DESCRIPTION

A common, contagious respiratory infection caused by a virus. Incubation after exposure is 24 to 48 hours. There are three main types of influenza (A, B, C), but they all have the ability to mutate into different forms. Outbreaks of different forms occur almost every winter with varying degrees of severity. Influenza affects both sexes and all ages.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Chills and moderate to high fever
- Muscle aches, including backache
- Cough, usually with little or no sputum
- Sore throat
- Hoarseness
- Runny nose
- Headache
- Fatigue

CAUSES

Infection by viruses of the myxovirus class. The viruses spread by personal or indirect contact.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Stress
- Excessive fatigue
- Extremes of ages
- Poor nutrition
- Recent illness that has lowered resistance
- Chronic illness, especially lung or heart disease
- Pregnancy (3rd trimester)
- People in semi-closed environments
- Immunosuppression from drugs or illness
- Crowded places during an epidemic
- Smoking

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

To avoid spreading germs to others, wash your hands frequently, especially after blowing your nose or before handling food. Use warm compresses or heating pad for aching muscles. Avoid risks listed above. Have a yearly influenza vaccine injection. Avoid unnecessary contact with persons who have upper respiratory infections during the flu season. Preventive medications are available for individuals who have been exposed to the flu virus and have not been vaccinated. Avoid smoking and second-hand smoke.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Spontaneous recovery in 7 to 14 days if no complications occur. Antibiotics are ineffective against viral illnesses. However, if complications arise, treatment with antibiotics may be necessary for secondary bacterial infection and recovery may take 3 to 6 weeks.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Bacterial infection, including bronchitis or pneumonia.

GENERAL MEASURES

Laboratory studies, including throat swabs and cultures may be used. To relieve nasal congestion, use saline nasal spray. To relieve a sore throat, gargle often with warm or cold, double-strength tea or salt water (1/2 tsp salt in 8 ounces water). Do not swallow. Use a cool-mist humidifier/vaporizer to increase air moisture. Don't put medicine in the humidifier; it does not help. Clean humidifier daily. If not available, place basin of water in room. Rest is the best medicine. If you are in good general health, rest helps your body fight the virus. Increase fluids. Avoid caffeine and alcohol. Any type and amount of solid food is acceptable as long as it can be swallowed without too much difficulty.

MEDICATION

Antibiotics are ineffective against viruses. For minor discomfort, you may use non-prescription drugs, such as acetaminophen, cough syrups, nasal sprays (no longer than 3 consecutive days) or decongestants. Avoid drinking alcohol while taking acetaminophen. Do not take aspirin. An antiviral drug for seriously ill persons or for those at greatest risk from complications may be prescribed.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- High persistent fever unrelieved with fever reducers
- Blood in the sputum
- Earache
- Shortness of breath or chest pain
- Sinus pain
- Neck pain or stiffness
- New unexplained symptoms develop
- Rash
- Severe headache

Student Health Center



WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.