

Influenza and Who Is at Risk¹

For Parents



What Is Influenza, or Flu?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Flu viruses are thought to spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza.

Symptoms of Seasonal Flu

- Fever (often high)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, can also occur but are more common in children than in adults

Complications of Flu

- Bacterial pneumonia
- Ear infections
- Sinus infections
- Dehydration
- Worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as:
 - Congestive heart failure
 - Asthma
 - Diabetes

Who Is at Risk?

Every year in the United States, on average:

- 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu.
- More than 200,000² people are hospitalized from flu-related complications
- In children younger than 5 years, flu-related illness is the most common cause of visits to medical practices and emergency departments.³
- As many as 36,000⁴ people die of flu-related causes.
- Children younger than age 5 are most likely to have an influenza-associated hospitalization—with a median stay of 3 days.⁵
- Influenza-related hospitalizations in children younger than 2 years of age are similar to rates in people 65 years and older.

People who are at increased risk for getting serious complications from seasonal flu illness include:

- Older people
- Young children
- Pregnant women
- People with certain chronic health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease)

Serious morbidity also occurs in individuals with no recognized underlying risk factors

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Key Facts About Seasonal Influenza (Flu)*. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>. Accessed March 6, 2012.
2. [/flu/about/qa/hospital.htm](#). Accessed March 6, 2012.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevention and control of seasonal influenza with vaccines: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), 2009. *MMWR*. 2009;58(RR-8):1-51.
4. [/flu/about/disease/us_flu-related_deaths.htm](#). Accessed March 6, 2012.
5. Thompson WW, Shay DK, Weintraub E, et al. Influenza-associated hospitalizations in the United States. *JAMA*. 2004;292:1333-1340.