

Seasonal and Pandemic Influenza

What is seasonal influenza?

The influenza virus that circulates every year causes an infectious disease known as influenza (flu). Symptoms of the flu include: sudden fever, headache, muscle aches and pains, fatigue, cough, sore throat, stuffy or runny nose. The virus can cause a mild or severe illness depending on the type of influenza virus and the age and general health of the affected person. It may take three days to show symptoms when you catch the flu and symptoms may last up to a week.

How do you catch seasonal influenza

The flu is very easily spread through tiny droplets that are released through talking, coughing and sneezing. The droplets containing the virus may infect someone else by coming into contact with their eyes, mouth or nose. These droplets can also land on and contaminate surfaces, such as tables, cups, pens and toys. Someone else may then become infected by handling the contaminated object and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Preventing seasonal influenza

Every year you can ask your doctor to vaccinate you against the flu. As the influenza virus changes frequently, you will need to get vaccinated every year to maintain your immunity. Good health hygiene habits can greatly reduce the chance that you will pass the flu on to others. If you have the flu, you should avoid public places and close contact with others, especially children. If you have the flu, you should always cough and sneeze into a disposable tissue and wash your hands afterwards.

What about an influenza pandemic?

An influenza pandemic can occur when a new strain of influenza virus appears, which can easily spread from person to person, and to which we have little or no natural immunity. It is impossible to predict where and when an influenza pandemic might begin. The Australian Government is taking steps to prevent pandemic influenza from occurring in Australia. In the event of an influenza pandemic, good respiratory hygiene habits that reduce the spread of seasonal influenza will also reduce the spread of pandemic influenza. These are simple things you can do, like covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, avoid touching your face with your hands and washing your hands regularly.

Do you need more information?

Visit the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing web site: www.health.gov.au Call the Department of Health and Ageing Information Hotline 1800 004 599 (8:30 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday, recorded message at all other times).

