



MERCY MEDICAL GROUP

Flu (Influenza)

DESCRIPTION

Influenza is a common, contagious respiratory infection caused by a virus. The influenza virus causes more severe symptoms than the cold viruses. Children, elderly and people with chronic illnesses are at a higher risk of developing severe flu symptoms and complications. Outbreaks of different forms of the influenza virus occur almost every winter with varying degrees of severity. Influenza tends to have a sudden onset of symptoms.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Fever (often 101 to 103 degrees Fahrenheit)
- Chills
- Sweating
- Muscle aches, including backache
- Headache
- Cough, usually with little or no sputum
- Sore throat
- Hoarseness
- Runny nose
- Fatigue.

CAUSES

Droplets of the infected person's respiratory fluids carry the virus. The influenza virus can infect you and be spread by personal contact (coughing, sneezing) or indirect contact (use of a contaminated drinking glass). Symptoms usually develop 24 to 48 hours after exposure.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid contact with the respiratory fluids of the infected person
- Have a yearly influenza vaccine if you are over age 50 or have a chronic disease
- Wash your hands with soap frequently
- Avoid contact with others for five days after development of symptoms because you are contagious.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Fever may last three to five days; however, fatigue may last up to 14 days.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Bacterial infections, including bronchitis or pneumonia can occur after the flu. These can be especially dangerous for children, the chronically ill or those over age 65.

TREATMENT

- Drink plenty of fluids
- For minor discomfort, you may use a nonprescription drug, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®)

- Do not take aspirin. Some research shows a link between the use of aspirin (especially in children) during a viral illness and the development of Reye's syndrome
- To relieve nasal irritation, use saline nasal spray
- To relieve a sore throat, gargle often with warm or cold, double-strength tea or salt water
- Use a cool-mist humidifier to increase air moisture and thin lung secretions
- An antiviral drug may be used for seriously ill persons or for those at greatest risk of complications.

CONSIDER NOTIFYING YOUR PHYSICIAN IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Increased fever or cough
- Blood in the sputum
- Earache
- Shortness of breath or chest pain
- Thick discharge from the nose, sinuses or ears
- Sinus pain
- Neck pain or stiffness
- New, unexplained symptoms.