



What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) is an infectious respiratory virus affecting the nose, throat and lungs. It occurs most often in the winter months and peaks between January and March.

Spread of infection is often rapid with widespread absenteeism from schools and nurseries. Children with certain underlying medical conditions (such as asthma) will be at additional risk from influenza.

Signs and Symptoms

Influenza is characterised by sudden onset. Fever, headache, muscle pains and chills are prominent at the beginning of the illness. Respiratory symptoms, including cough become more pronounced from the third day and last for 3-4 days though the cough may persist for a further 1-2 weeks. Young children typically have a milder disease though the fever may be higher. Muscle pain and headache are typically seen in older children and adults. Up to 25% of children may also have nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea.

How does influenza spread?

The influenza virus is spread in small droplets of fluid which are made when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. These droplets may also contaminate hands, cups, toys or other items and spread infection to others who may use or touch those items.

The incubation period is 1-3 days. The infectious period is from 24 hours before the onset of symptoms until 5-10 days after the first symptoms.

Exclusion advice

Children and staff should stay at home until they are free of symptoms and are recovered.

What can you do to prevent influenza?

Influenza immunisation is a safe and highly effective method of preventing disease and is recommended to all those in at risk groups, including children with certain medical conditions. In addition the vaccination will be offered to all children aged 2 to 4 and to school aged children in targeted year groups.

Good respiratory and hand hygiene is critical.

- wash hands regularly with soap and water – some children may need assistance
- regularly clean surfaces such as door handles, light switches, surfaces, toys, computer keyboards and phones
- use tissues to cover the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing and encourage children to do so and put used tissues in a bin – again children may need assistance with this. After using tissues it is also important to wash hands (**catch it, bin it, kill it**).

Contacting the health protection team

If you have any concerns regarding increased absences due to respiratory illness or if you have any questions please ring the health protection team on 0344 225 3560 option 2, 1.

Further information

NHS choices www.nhs.uk

Department of Health www.gov.uk
