



## Influenza

### MU Patient Education Series

#### Definition:

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is an acute viral infection that affects your respiratory system. The flu attacks your lungs, nose and throat. The symptoms of the flu resemble those of the common cold. The flu is highly contagious and can be spread through the air or by direct contact.

#### CAUSES:

The influenza virus travels through the air from a cough, sneeze or exhale. You can pick up the virus from the air, through direct contact with an infected individual or even by touching an object that was touched by someone with the flu. When you touch the virus, you may then proceed to touch your eyes, nose or mouth and before you know it, you are sick with the flu!

Who is at high risk for the flu?

Influenza is most prevalent in the autumn and winter seasons. Everybody is more susceptible during these seasons. In addition to the time of year, there are other factors that may increase your risk of acquiring the flu. Some of these factors include:

- Age (young children and adults over 65 are more susceptible)
- Pregnancy
- Weakened immune system
- Certain living conditions that involve many people living together
- Certain chronic medical conditions

#### SIGNS/SYMPTOMS:

About three days after being exposed to the influenza virus, you will begin to show symptoms. At first, the symptoms may resemble those of the average cold. Eventually you will begin to experience some of



the following, more severe symptoms:

- High fever
- Dry cough
- Aching muscles
- Chills
- Sweats
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Nasal congestion
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Headache

### TREATMENT/CARE:

Typically, the flu is treated with lots of rest and fluids. The virus runs its course and your symptoms will improve soon. In some cases, antiviral medications are used to speed up your recovery time. Pain relievers and fever reducers may also be used to relieve your symptoms. Do not give aspirin to children or teens. Although rare, there is a risk of developing Reye's Syndrome, a very serious condition.

### PREVENTION:

The most effective preventative measure for the flu is the influenza vaccination. It has been found that the vaccine can prevent 70%-90% of all influenza illnesses. This vaccine can help you avoid the virus and its potential complications. Other preventative measures include:

- Washing your hands
- Avoiding those who are sick
- Covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, and then washing your hands afterwards
- Avoiding large crowds during heavy flu seasons
- Using tissues when blowing your nose



### CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF:

The flu usually runs its course and after some rest, you should be back to normal. But in some cases, complications arise. If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms, be sure to contact your healthcare provider immediately:

- Fever over 103° F
- Difficulty breathing
- Unusual exhaustion or confusion
- Vomiting
- Repeated diarrhea

### **DISCLAIMER:**

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