

Seasonal Influenza (flu)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact: The Infection Prevention and Control Team, York telephone: 01904 725860, York Hospital or Scarborough telephone: 01723 342395, Scarborough Hospital

What is flu?

It is a respiratory illness associated with infection by the influenza virus. Symptoms include headache, fever, shivering, dry cough, sore throat and aching muscles and joints. Most people confuse flu with a heavy cold; however, flu is usually a more severe illness than the common cold, which is caused by other respiratory viruses. Flu can affect different people in a variety of ways, ranging from minor symptoms through to pneumonia and in very rare cases death.

How serious is flu infection?

Flu usually makes people feel worse than an ordinary cold. For most people flu infection is just a nasty experience but for some it can lead to illnesses that are more serious. The most common complications of flu are bronchitis and pneumonia, which in some cases may require treatment in hospital. Some types of flu can cause serious illness in young, otherwise healthy individuals.

How is flu diagnosed?

Usually, a doctor will diagnose a case of the flu based on typical symptoms of fever, chills, headache, cough and body aches. In hospital a throat swab will be taken to diagnose flu.

If you are admitted to hospital

If you are admitted to hospital with suspected or confirmed flu you will be nursed in a single room with the door closed. If you have confirmed flu you may be placed in a bay on a ward with other patients who have the same

infection. Health care workers will wear aprons, gloves, a face mask and eye protection when caring for you.

How is flu spread?

The flu virus is highly infectious and is easily passed from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Transmission can also occur by touching a surface contaminated with respiratory secretions and then putting the fingers in the mouth or nose or near the eyes. The flu virus can live on surfaces such as a door knob, computer keyboard or telephone for up to 24 hours.

To reduce spread of the virus

It is important if someone has a respiratory infection that they cover their nose and mouth, preferably with a tissue, when they cough and sneeze and wash their hands straight afterwards. Used tissues should be disposed of immediately after use in a waste bin.

If you are able to do so you should wear a surgical mask whilst in hospital. If you don't have one just ask a member of staff. If you can only manage to wear a mask for part of the time it is most important when you leave your bed space, if you are in a bay, or the single room you are in, for example to be taken to another department.

If you are in hospital your room will be cleaned more frequently. The virus can easily be destroyed. At home normal household disinfection products, such as bleach, can be used to clean the room of someone who has flu. Pay particular attention to hard surfaces including telephones, door knobs and light switches. Wash bed linen at the highest temperature indicated on the fabric care label, making sure you wash your hands using soap and water afterwards.

The incubation period – the period between infection and the appearance of symptoms – is about two to three days. Although the virus is present before symptoms appear, adults are usually considered infectious once symptoms appear and for three to five days afterwards. This period is longer in children and people with less effective immune systems.

What should I do if I get flu?

Rest at home, drink plenty of fluids and take painkillers such as paracetamol if necessary. If you are generally healthy, most flu-like illnesses caused either by flu or other viruses will be short-lived and need no specific treatment or hospital admission. Medical advice should be sought from your GP if symptoms become severe or last more than about a week. Those with chronic or long-standing illness may need medical attention earlier.

Who is most at risk from the complications of flu?

The young have a greater risk of being infected because they have not developed immunity (resistance) to the virus.

The elderly have a greater risk of the severe complications of infection such as pneumonia, because they often have underlying diseases, which reduce their resistance to infection. Elderly people's immune systems may also be less effective in fighting off the virus.

Other high-risk groups include individuals who have ongoing respiratory (lung), cardiac (heart) or immune conditions that make them more vulnerable to flu and more likely to suffer severe illness.

What precautions should people take?

Routine vaccination offers the best protection and people who are at high risk of infection should be vaccinated annually. Keeping away from crowded places can reduce the risk of becoming infected and spreading it to others. A previous flu infection or vaccination will not necessarily provide protection against further infections because the virus is continually changing, and different types circulate each winter.

Does the vaccine have any side effects?

Flu vaccines are very safe. They may cause some soreness where you were injected and, less often, a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days.

Can the vaccine cause flu?

No. The vaccine cannot cause flu because it does not contain live virus.

If you have any concerns or would like to know more, contact your GP.

Other sources of information

NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/flu/>

How do I find out more?

More information is available from your doctor or nurse. You can also contact the Infection Prevention Team:

York Hospital
Telephone: 01904 725860

Scarborough Hospital
Telephone: 01723 342395

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 725860. Scarborough Hospital, Woodlands Drive, Scarborough, YO12 6QL or telephone 01723 342395.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website: www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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