

Influenza (Flu)

Information for Patients, Relatives and Visitors

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet is to provide information for patients who have been diagnosed with Influenza and their relatives and visitors.

What is influenza?

Influenza, also known as 'flu', is a virus which spreads through direct contact with individuals, direct contact with contaminated objects or by inhaling droplets of virus produced by the coughing or sneezing of an infected individual.

What causes it ?

Influenza is caused by a virus and can affect anyone but certain people are more susceptible than others. People over the age of 65 years, those with chronic health conditions (like lung disease, heart disease or diabetes), children under 5 years, pregnant women are at higher risk.

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms include:

- Fever/temperature
- Runny or blocked nose
- Sneezing
- Dry or chesty cough
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Lethargy/tiredness
- Chills
- Aching muscles and joint pain
- Diarrhoea/upset stomach and loss of appetite

Diagnosis

Influenza may be diagnosed by a healthcare professional based on symptoms. Laboratory confirmation may be performed where there is uncertainty by taking a throat swab that can be tested for viruses.

Treatments available

Antiviral medication such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) may be prescribed while in hospital. Antibiotics are not effective against the influenza viruses but may be given if a bacterial infection such as chest infection occurs as a complication.

Can I pass this on to anyone else?

Influenza is infectious and can be passed on to someone else by coughing and sneezing. You can help limit the spread to others by using tissues to contain coughs and sneezes, promptly disposing of these tissues in the bin and washing your hands with soap and water or using the alcohol gel available at your bedspace or room.

While in hospital you will either be placed in a room or in a shared area with other patients who also have influenza with control measures in place to prevent spread.

Staff attending to you will wear aprons, gloves and a face mask in close contact with you and carry out hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol gel. This is to protect themselves and prevent the spread of influenza to other patients.

If you have a temperature and are coughing and sneezing, your visitors will be asked to keep to a minimum and discouraged from visiting if they are at risk of developing complications of influenza.

Visitors need not wear gloves and aprons but should be offered a face mask to wear whilst visiting and encouraged to wash their hands or use the alcohol gel provided on entering and leaving the room.

Prevention

Annual immunisation is available for people aged 65 and over, those who have certain medical conditions such as asthma, COPD, heart disease, kidney disease, those who have poor or compromised immune systems, pregnant women and pre and primary school aged children.

Further information on flu can be obtained from the NHS website