

Influenza

(Also known as flu)

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What is influenza?

Flu is caused by the influenza virus. This virus is identified as 3 different strains, A, B and C. A is the most frequently seen and is the cause of major influenza outbreaks. B tends to circulate with A in yearly outbreaks and causes less severe illness. C tends to cause a mild or asymptomatic illness similar to the common cold.

It is very common with more than 1 million cases per year in the UK. However, it can cause severe illness and even death among vulnerable groups, including older people, pregnant women and people with an underlying health condition. Certain people are more likely to develop potentially serious complications of flu, such as **bronchitis** and **pneumonia**. These people are advised to have a flu vaccine each year.

How is Influenza passed on between people?

Flu spreads directly from airborne droplets produced during sneezing or coughing or from contact with the nose or eye with hands that have picked up the virus from contaminated surfaces where it can survive for up to 24 hours. This is why hand hygiene and cleaning are so vital to stop the spread of infection.

What are Influenza symptoms?

A combination of the following; high temperature, feeling generally unwell, headache, runny nose, sneezing, reduced sense of smell, metallic taste in the mouth, chills/shivering, cough, body or muscle pain and sore throat. These symptoms can last several days or weeks.

How is Influenza diagnosed?

In hospital diagnosis will be by Nasopharyngeal swabs (Nose and throat swabs). These are taken by healthcare staff and sent to the microbiology lab for diagnosis. However, GPs and pharmacists will often diagnose influenza and provide advice after you describe your symptoms.

How is *Influenza* managed in hospital?

Patients suspected or confirmed to have influenza will be nursed in a single room. You will be prescribed medications to manage symptoms, such as painkillers for

head and body aches and fluids to manage dehydration. In some cases you will be prescribed antiviral medication.

Hospital staff will:

- They will ensure they wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water when they enter and leave the room
- Wear disposable aprons and gloves when providing care in the room and manage used bedding and waste from the room or bay as infected

What you can do:

Flu is very infectious and easily spread to other people. You are more likely to give it to others in the first 5 days of symptoms.

To reduce the risk of spreading flu:

- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap
- Use tissues rather than linen hankies to trap germs when you cough or sneeze and bin used tissues as quickly as possible
- Keep hydrated, drink plenty of fluids
- Ask the advice of your pharmacist to treat symptoms such as a sore throat and fever
- Don't keep going to work as you may infect your colleagues and it is important to get some rest
- Don't share your belongings with other patients

Visitors

- Visitors must wash their hands before and after visiting wards by using the hand hygiene stations (alcohol gel) which are found outside every ward
- Visitors must wash their hands every time they leave the single room, before eating and after using the toilet
- They should not visit if they are feeling unwell. Young children and babies should avoid visiting
- Visitors should observe any visiting time restrictions in place as these help us to make sure the ward is cleaned thoroughly throughout the day
- Visitors should not visit anyone else in hospital at the same time as visiting you so as to avoid spreading any infections

What the hospital is doing

The prevention of infection is a priority for United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust.

To prevent infections, we:

- Train all staff how to wash their hands and clean equipment correctly
- Ensure staff are “bare below the elbows” and decontaminate their hands before and after each time they touch a patient or the patient’s environment
- Monitor standards of hygiene in all wards and departments
- Encourage visitors to wash their hands before and after visiting wards.

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your nurse for advice or ask to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention Team.

Infection Prevention Team

United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust has worked with AccessAble to create detailed Access Guides to facilities, wards and departments at our sites.

www.accessable.co.uk/united-lincolnshire-hospitals-nhs-trust

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If you require this information in another language, large print, audio (CD or tape) or braille, please email the Patient Information team at patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk