

Influenza (Flu)

The flu is a highly contagious disease caused by the influenza virus. People with cystic fibrosis (CF) can be more seriously affected by the flu than the general population so it is important to reduce the risks to protect yourself and your loved ones.

The flu is not the same as a cold and can lead to worsening of CF symptoms and hospitalisation. Babies and the elderly are at a higher risk of contracting the flu as well as people with weakened immune systems and other medical conditions.

Flu Symptoms

- Runny nose, sore throat or sneezing
- Muscle aches, headache and fatigue
- Increased cough
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea
- Fever and chills

How is the flu spread?

The flu is spread by direct contact with fluid from an infected persons coughs or sneezes, indirect contact with a contaminated surface like a table or tissue or breathing the virus in through the air.

It spreads easily through families, day cares, schools and workplaces.

Reducing the Risk

To reduce the risk of getting and spreading the flu it is important for you and those close to you to follow recommended infection prevention guidelines including:

- Vaccination for you and your family
- Staying at home when you are unwell
- Avoiding people who are unwell or who have been in contact with the flu
- Coughing or sneezing into your elbow and encouraging others to do the same
- Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand gel

Vaccination

Vaccination every season is the best way to reduce your risk of getting the flu and protect you from serious disease. People with CF should have the flu shot every year to protect against new strains of the influenza virus.

The flu vaccine will not give you the flu as the virus is inactive. You may have mild side-effects including soreness, redness or swelling and a low-grade fever.

Vaccination for Family and Friends

As the flu is highly contagious it is important to encourage those around you, especially close family members, to get their flu vaccination. The more people in your circle who have received the flu shot, the more difficult it is for influenza to spread. This provides protection for vulnerable people in the community including people with CF and those who are not able to have the flu shot, such as babies under 6 months of age.

Treatment

Some flu symptoms may be relieved getting plenty of rest, drinking lots of fluids and taking regular pain relief medication such as paracetamol and ibuprofen.

If you become seriously unwell you may require hospitalisation and develop complications such as pneumonia. If you think you or your child has the flu contact your GP as an antiviral medication may be possible if caught very early. If you continue to be concerned please contact your CF clinical team for advice.

References

<https://beta.health.gov.au/health-topics/flu-influenza>

<https://www.cff.org/Life-With-CF/Daily-Life/Germs-and-Staying-Healthy/What-Are-Germs/The-Flu/>

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