

Patient information

Influenza

Influenza (also known as 'flu) is a respiratory illness which is caused by the influenza virus. For most people influenza is just a nasty experience, but for some it can lead to illnesses that are more serious such as bronchitis and pneumonia. These illnesses may require treatment in hospital and can be life-threatening especially in the elderly, asthmatics and those in poor health. Most people confuse influenza with a heavy cold; however influenza is usually a more severe illness than the common cold.



What causes influenza?

Influenza is caused by the influenza ('flu) virus. There are 2 main types that cause infection: **influenza A** and **influenza B**. Influenza A is usually a more severe infection than influenza B. Each year 1 or 2 sub-types (strains) of influenza A may be in circulation and 1 type of influenza B. Influenza C is an uncommon type that infrequently causes infection.

How does influenza spread?

The 'flu virus is highly contagious and is easily passed from person to person, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, releasing infected droplets into the air. These droplets then land on surfaces and can be picked up by others who touch them. They can then be spread to other surfaces if the person touches something else. The virus can enter the body when someone touches the surface and then puts their hands/fingers near their mouth, nose or eyes. The droplets can also be breathed in from the air. The 'flu virus can live on a hard surface for up to 24 hours and a soft surface for around 20 minutes.

How is influenza diagnosed?

A doctor will diagnose a case of the 'flu based on your symptoms. Tests to confirm the 'flu are costly and time consuming and are not routinely used. However in hospital viral swabs may be taken.

What is the treatment for influenza?

It is best to treat the infection at home until you are well enough to return to normal activities. If you have a chronic or long-standing illness or your symptoms become severe or last for more than 1 week please seek advice from your GP.

The treatment for influenza involves:

- rest
- drinking plenty of fluids
- taking painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen

Make sure you read the manufacturers leaflet that comes with any medicines and do not exceed the recommended dose. If you are taking a product for colds and 'flu, please check with your pharmacist or the product information leaflet as many of these products will also contain paracetamol, aspirin or ibuprofen.

How can the spread of influenza be prevented?

- **Vaccination** against influenza is the best way of protecting yourself from the virus.
- **Keep away from crowded places** to reduce the risk of becoming infected and spreading it to others.

Respiratory precautions/etiquette are essential:

- **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue** when you cough or sneeze, dispose of the tissue in a bin and wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.
- **Cleaning can destroy the virus easily.**

Advice when visiting relatives or friends

- Please do not visit the hospital if you are unwell.
- Children under 12 should not visit.
- Exceptions can be arranged with the Nurse in charge for exceptional circumstances.
- Pregnant visitors are advised not to visit whilst influenza is suspected.

Wear protective equipment

- For your protection and that of the patients our staff will wear protective clothing gloves and aprons. In addition, when giving close personal care, a mask will be worn. We would advise that visitors also follow this advice however this is advice only. Staff will assist as necessary.
- Once protective equipment (gloves, apron, mask) is removed and disposed of please decontaminate hands either using soap and water or alcohol hand gel.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the hospital website www.wsh.nhs.uk and click on the link, or visit the disabledgo website:

<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>