

**What is the flu?**

The flu, or influenza, is a respiratory illness caused by airborne viruses that spread from person-to-person by droplets from coughing, sneezing, or speaking. The period between becoming infected with the virus and becoming ill is usually 1 to 4 days. The contagious period is 3 to 5 days from the onset of symptoms. Symptoms of the flu, or influenza, are:

* Fever (up to 104 degrees) and sweating/chills
* Headache, muscle aches and/or stiffness
* Shortness of breath
* Vomiting and nausea (in children)

**How Flu Spreads**

Flu viruses spread in respiratory droplets caused by coughing, sneezing and speaking. They usually spread from close person-to-person contact, though sometimes people become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth, eyes or nose. The virus can live for as long as two days on surfaces like doorknobs, desks and tables.

Healthy adults, infected with the virus, may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 days **after** becoming sick. That means that you can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.