According to the CDC, influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. Serious outcomes of flu infection can result in hospitalization or death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated each year.

Signs and symptoms include: The flu usually comes on suddenly. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms: fever or feeling feverish/chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue or tiredness. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

People with flu can spread it to others up to about 6 feet away. Most experts think that flu viruses are spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth or nose.

To avoid this, people should stay away from sick people and stay home if sick. It also is important to wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub. Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick should not be shared without washing thoroughly first. Eating utensils can be washed either in a dishwasher or by hand with water and soap and do not need to be cleaned separately. Further, frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at home, work and school, especially if someone is ill.

**The Flu Is Contagious**

Most healthy adults may be able to infect other people beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick. Children may pass the virus for longer than 7 days. Symptoms start 1 to 4 days after the virus enters the body. **That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick**. Some people can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons may still spread the virus to others.

For more information please go to the CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/index.htm>