What is influenza?
Influenza is more commonly known as the flu. It is a serious viral infection that affects the respiratory tract. It is highly contagious.

There are three types of flu virus – Influenza A, B, and C. Most infections are with Influenza A and B. The virus frequently changes to produce new strains of the flu each year. This is why flu epidemics (local outbreaks) and pandemics (worldwide outbreaks) sometimes occur. This is also why the flu vaccine changes every year.

Who is most at risk?
Anyone can get the flu. You can get it at home, or in hospital. Those at most risk of complications from the flu include:

- pregnant women
- older people
- people with weakened immune systems (for example, people with cancer or those who have had transplants).

You can get the flu any time of the year, but it is most common in the winter months.

What are the symptoms?
Symptoms of the flu are usually more severe than the common cold. They may include the sudden onset of:

- fevers and chills
- sore throat and cough
- body aches and pains
- feeling tired, weak, or low in energy
- runny nose or headache
- nausea, vomiting, or diarrhoea.

Flu symptoms usually last for 7-10 days. In rare cases, the flu may cause pneumonia, inflammation of the brain or heart, or death

How is influenza spread?
Infection is spread in small droplet particles that are released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These particles can be transmitted over 1-2 metres through the air.
The virus can also survive for several hours outside of the body, and spread on unclean hands or touching contaminated objects.

Adults are generally infectious from the day before symptoms appear, and for around 5 days after symptoms start. People with weakened immune systems may be infectious and have symptoms for longer.
Influenza
Patient Information

Contact information
Ph: 03 9076 3139

Infection Prevention
– The Alfred
55 Commercial Road,
Melbourne VIC 3004
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Antibiotics do not work against the flu. Annual vaccination is the best way to protect people against the flu.

I have the flu. How will I be cared for in hospital?

Isolation: You may be cared for in a single room. Health care workers may wear a mask, gown, and gloves when entering your room and during your care. This is to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to other patients they are caring for.

Hand hygiene: It is important that staff, patients and visitors clean their hands every time they enter or leave your room. They can use alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.

It’s OK to ask: Please feel free to remind your health care worker to clean their hands.

Cleaning: Your room will be regularly cleaned with a focus on frequently touched surfaces.

As a patient, what should I do?
- cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. If possible, cough into your elbow and not into your hands.
- use tissues when you need to sneeze, cough, or blow your nose. Immediately throw them into the bin.
- Wash or disinfect your hands immediately afterwards.
- Staff may ask you to wear a mask when leaving your room.

What should my visitors do?
Your visitors are at risk of catching the flu. If people close to you have developed symptoms of the flu, they should not visit you until after all of their symptoms are gone.

Your visitors may need to wear a mask and eye protection for close contact with you (i.e. within 1 metre). Staff will show your visitors how to wear these.

Visitors should keep their hands away from their face (especially mouth and nose). They should clean their hands regularly. If you have the flu, your visitors should not visit other patients.

If you would like to provide feedback or request a copy in a different format, contact us at patient.info@alfred.org.au

Any questions?
If you would like further information about Seasonal Influenza, please contact Alfred Health Infection Prevention on (03) 9076 3139.

Further information:
Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

National Safety & Quality
www.safetyandquality.gov.au/