



UNIVERSITY OF EMBU

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

Influenza (Seasonal Flu)

Seasonal influenza is an acute respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses which circulate in all parts of the world.

There are 4 types of influenza viruses: types A, B, C and D. Influenza A and B viruses cause **seasonal epidemics** of disease.

Signs and symptoms

Seasonal influenza is characterized by a sudden onset of **fever, cough (usually dry), headache, muscle and joint pain, severe body weakness (feeling unwell), sore throat and a runny nose**. The cough can be **severe and can last 2 or more weeks**. Influenza can also cause severe illness.

Epidemiology

All age groups can be affected but there are **groups that are more at risk** than others.

People at greater risk of severe disease or complications when infected are:

- i. Pregnant women
- ii. Children under 59 months
- iii. The elderly- above 65 years
- iv. Individuals with chronic medical conditions (such as chronic heart, kidney, metabolic, liver or blood diseases)
- v. Individuals with immunosuppressive conditions (such as HIV, receiving chemotherapy or steroids)

Health care workers are at high risk acquiring influenza virus infection due to increased exposure to patients.

Transmission

Seasonal influenza spreads easily, with rapid transmission in **crowded areas to include schools, public places and shared work spaces**.



When an infected person coughs or sneezes, droplets containing viruses (infectious droplets) are dispersed into the air and can spread up to one meter and infect persons in close proximity who breathe these droplets in.

The virus can also be spread by hands contaminated with influenza viruses. To prevent transmission, people should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing, and wash their hands regularly.

Treatment

Patients that are not from a high risk group should be managed with **symptomatic treatment**. Treatment focuses on relieving symptoms of influenza such as fever. Patients should monitor themselves to detect if their condition deteriorates and seek medical attention.

Prevention

The most effective way to prevent the disease is **vaccination**.

The World Health Organization recommends annual vaccination for:

- Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy
- Children aged between 6 months to 5 years
- Elderly individuals (aged more than 65 years)
- Individuals with chronic medical conditions
- Health-care workers.

Apart from vaccination, the public health management includes **personal protective measures** like:

- ✓ Regular hand washing with proper drying of the hands
- ✓ Good respiratory hygiene – covering mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, using tissues and disposing of them correctly
- ✓ Early self-isolation of those feeling unwell, feverish and having other symptoms of influenza
- ✓ Avoiding close contact with sick people
- ✓ Avoiding touching one's eyes, nose or mouth
- ✓ Use a mask if or when you have symptoms
- ✓ Work in well ventilated spaces- always open windows in shared work spaces.

NOTE:

Flu can look like COVID-19 as symptoms are very similar. Therefore, do not ignore if symptoms persist as COVID-19 is still with us.

Avoid self-medication and instead seek treatment at a health facility.

