

Seasonal influenza

Every winter, the population in the northern hemisphere is affected by influenza outbreaks. This is called seasonal influenza. Typically, five to ten per cent of the population becomes ill during a winter season. Seasonal variation in the make-up of the virus may cause greater risk of infection and more severe influenza symptoms.

Typically, influenza symptoms appear suddenly with fever, muscle aches, headaches, malaise and dry cough. Stomach problems are rare, but diarrhea may occur, especially in children. Influenza symptoms usually last for seven to ten days.

Influenza is transmitted if droplets are inhaled when infected people cough or sneeze, known as droplet transmission. It is also possible to be infected by direct contact and in some cases the virus can remain airborne for a little longer than with droplet transmission. The incubation period from transmission to symptom outbreak is usually two to three days. A person is infectious some hours before onset of symptoms and for three to five days afterwards.

The general prevention advice is to **wash hands often and avoid coughing and sneezing on others or at things other people often touch**. If you have a fever, you should stay away from work.

The most important preventive measure is vaccination. The seasonal influenza vaccine contains the influenza virus variants recommended by the WHO and should be given between October and November. Protection is acquired after one to two weeks. The vaccine provides protection in 50-80 per cent of those vaccinated.

Resource: Norwegian Institute of Public Health.