• You can help stop yourself getting flu or spreading it to others using good hygiene measures.
• Always wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water; as well as:
  • Wipe surfaces regularly, with a disinfectant to get rid of germs; these include door handles, telephones, and the computer keyboard
  • Use tissues to cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze
  • Dispose of used tissues in a bin immediately after use
  • Avoid unnecessary contact with other people so as not to infect others
• Do not go to work or school until you are better.
• The annual flu vaccine is the most effective way to help reduce the risk of becoming infected and spreading the flu.

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF FLU

• The influenza vaccine is available for free to:
  • Persons aged 65 years and older
  • Persons resident in institutions
  • Students attending special schools
  • Persons residing in institutions
  • Persons of any age suffering from - chronic respiratory disorder, chronic heart disorder, chronic liver disease, chronic kidney disease, diabetes mellitus, any chronic, immunodeficiency state, including HIV or AIDS
  • Persons aged 55 years and older

The viruses that cause influenza change every year. In order to remain protected you need to take the influenza vaccine every year. For more information contact the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate on 23266000 or the National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate.

THE INFLUENZA VACCINE
Influenza is a common infectious respiratory viral disease which can become quite severe in some cases. You can get influenza all year round, but it is more common in winter. This is why it is known as “seasonal influenza”. Flu is different from the common cold as it is caused by a different group of viruses. Flu symptoms such as blocked or runny nose, sneezing, and a sore throat usually have a more sudden onset, are more severe and last longer than those of the common cold.

Flu can make you feel so exhausted and unwell that you have to stay in bed.

Flu symptoms:
• appear suddenly
• usually include fever and aching muscles
• make you feel too unwell to continue with your daily activities

Cold symptoms:
• appear gradually
• mainly affect your nose and throat
• are fairly mild, so you can still continue with your daily activities

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell if you have influenza or just a common cold, as the symptoms get be quite similar. The main differences are:

If you are normally fit and healthy and have mild influenza like symptoms, there is usually no need to see a doctor. The best thing to do is to rest at home, keep warm and drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

If necessary you can take medication to lower the fever and relieve aches and pains. Do not give aspirin to children under 12 years of age. Do not go to work or school until you feel better. This usually takes about a week.

You should consider visiting your GP if:
• YOU ARE PREGNANT
• YOU HAVE A LONG-TERM MEDICAL CONDITION - SUCH AS DIABETES, HEART DISEASE, LUNG DISEASE, KIDNEY DISEASE OR A NEUROLOGICAL DISEASE
• YOUR SYMPTOMS ARE GETTING WORSE OVER TIME OR HAVE NOT IMPROVED AFTER A WEEK
• YOU ARE 65 YEARS OF AGE OR OVER
• YOU HAVE A WEAKENED IMMUNE SYSTEM - FOR EXAMPLE, IF TAKING CHEMOTHERAPY OR HAVE HIV YOU DEVELOP CHEST PAIN, SHORTNESS OF BREATH, OR DIFFICULTY IN BREATHING, OR START COUGHING UP BLOOD

You have a long-term medical condition such as diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, kidney disease or a neurological disease.

In these situations, you may need medication to treat or prevent flu complications. Your doctor may recommend medication to reduce your symptoms.

How do you get flu?
The influenza virus is contained in the millions of tiny droplets that come out of the nose and mouth when someone who is infected coughs or sneezes. These droplets typically spread for about one meter. They hang suspended in the air for a while before landing on surfaces, where the virus can survive for up to 24 hours. Anyone who breathes in the droplets can get flu. One can also get infected by touching surfaces that droplets have landed on and then touching the nose, eyes or mouth.

Surfaces at home and in public places can easily become contaminated with the flu virus, including door handles, remote controls, stair rails, telephones and computer keyboards. It is very important to wash your hands with soap frequently.