

Facts about influenza speak louder than words

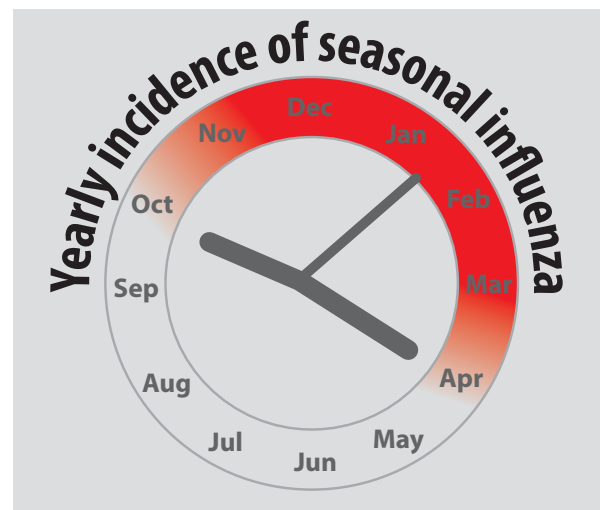
“Influenza is the most frequent cause of death from a vaccine-preventable disease”

Every year, seasonal influenza is the cause of about 3 million to 5 million cases of severe illness and 250 000 to 500 000 deaths worldwide. Influenza-related deaths and illnesses have an obvious economic burden due to absenteeism from work, hospitalization and loss of working hours. For instance, in the United States alone influenza-related yearly costs are estimated to be US\$ 87.1 billion.

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“The timing of the influenza season is unpredictable but generally lasts for 8 to 10 weeks and always in winter in temperate zones”

Seasonal influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. In temperate climates, disease tends to occur seasonally in the winter months, spreading from person to person through sneezing, coughing, or touching contaminated surfaces. Seasonal influenza can lead to pneumonia and blood infections, and can cause diarrhoea and seizures in children. It can worsen existing medical conditions, such as heart or lung diseases. Influenza is more dangerous for infants and young children, people aged 65 years of age and older, pregnant women and people with certain health conditions or a weakened immune system. The risk of developing seasonal influenza-related complications decreases over time from birth to 2 years of age and then begins to increase sharply from the age of 50 years onwards.



“Morbidity and mortality associated with seasonal influenza are concentrated at the extremes of age – the very young and the very old”

Influenza occurs globally with an annual attack rate estimated at 5–10% in adults and 20–30% in children. The precise effects of seasonal influenza epidemics in developing countries are not known, but existing evidence indicates a large per cent of child deaths associated with influenza occur in developing countries every year. Influenza is an important contributor to hospitalizations for severe respiratory illness among children worldwide. A study based on meta-analysis has found influenza to be associated with almost 10% hospitalizations for severe respiratory infection among children under 18 years old worldwide. Influenza results in about nearly one million hospitalizations annually among children under 5 years of age. While mortality and morbidity due to influenza-related illness are concentrated at the extremes of age, people of any age with certain chronic illnesses are also more severely affected.

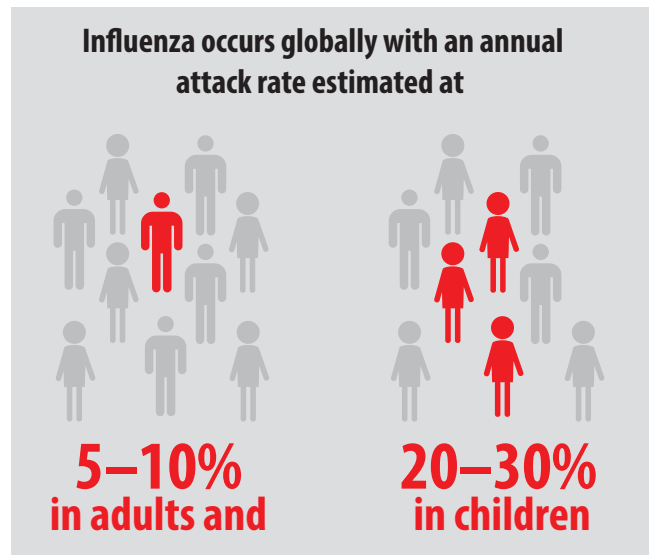
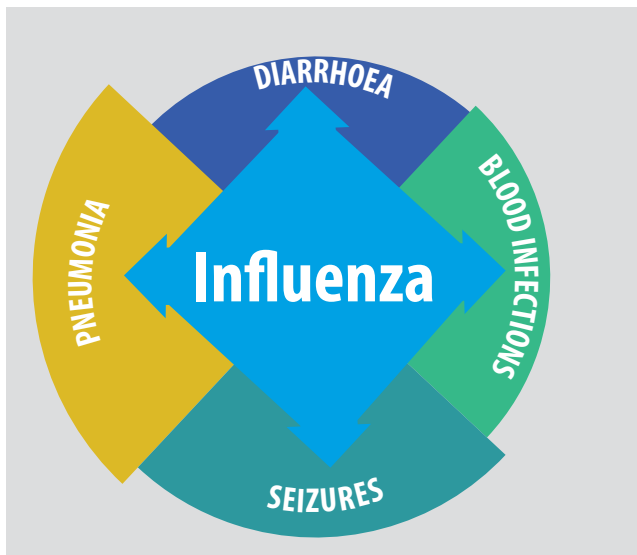
Influenza is more dangerous for:



“Vaccination is the most effective form of influenza prevention”

The best way to protect against influenza is to get a vaccine every winter season. It is important to get an influenza vaccine every year because influenza viruses are constantly changing, so influenza vaccines may be updated from one season to the next to protect against the viruses that research shows will be most common during the upcoming influenza season. A person's immune protection from the influenza vaccine declines over time, yearly vaccination is needed for the best protection. Influenza vaccine can protect and prevent severe illness and even death.

Other than getting the vaccine everyday simple steps can help prevent the spread of influenza viruses, including avoiding close contact with sick people, washing hands often, keeping hands away from the face and covering coughs and sneezes.



“Seasonal influenza is a preventable infectious disease that warrants greater public health attention and policy discourse”

Improved vaccination and health education strategies can help combat seasonal influenza. Continuous research and international cooperation is also required to inform future efforts for prevention and control of disease. The following set of strategies has proven to be the most effective in preventing seasonal influenza:

- Regular health education initiatives, especially before the start of every winter season, on prevention from seasonal influenza can help reduce the disease burden. For instance, one of the most commonly cited barriers to vaccination is lack of knowledge about influenza virus infection.
- Accessibility and availability of influenza vaccination, especially to vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women, older people and the chronically ill, is essential for reducing incidents of fatalities and severe morbidity associated with the disease. Influenza vaccination is found to have reduced the risk of hospitalization by more than half among older people, and also by half, influenza-related illness among pregnant women. In the United States, for instance, nine out of 10 children who die from influenza are not vaccinated.
- Necessitating influenza vaccination for anyone who might transmit influenza to someone at risk can also help curtail the spread of the disease. This includes health care workers, including those in training, emergency response workers, direct care staff, people who live with or care for anyone who may be vulnerable to infection, and people who live with or care for infants under 6 months of age, including parents, siblings and day care providers.

