# Understanding Influenza

## What is it?

**Influenza, or the flu, is a common and highly contagious, infectious respiratory disease that affects the nose, throat and lungs.**

Influenza viruses can change rapidly. That’s why there is a new flu shot made every year to protect against the circulating virus strains.

**A cold is a mild infection of the nose and throat caused by a variety of viruses.** Although a cold might linger, the symptoms remain mild.

## Symptoms

### Almost always
- Sudden onset of cough and fever

### Common
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Decreased appetite
- Runny nose

### Sometimes
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

### Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Cough
- Sore throat

## People at Risk of Complications

The following groups are not more likely to get the flu. However, they are more at risk of developing complications if they do get sick:

1. Children under five years of age (especially those less than two years old)
2. Women who are pregnant
3. People with chronic conditions such as:
   - Heart disease
   - Liver disease
   - Kidney disease
   - Blood disorders
   - Diabetes
   - Severe obesity
   - Asthma and chronic lung disease
   - Immunosuppressed (people taking cancer drugs or people with HIV/AIDS)
   - Neurological disorders
4. Aboriginal people

**IMPORTANT** If you have flu symptoms and you have one of these risk factors, contact a health care provider as soon as possible — antiviral medications may be needed.

## Severity Indicators

If you develop the following symptoms, you need to see a health care provider right away:

- Shortness of breath, rapid or difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Bluish or grey skin color
- Bloody or coloured mucus/spit
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- High fever lasting more than three days
- Low blood pressure

Additional symptoms to watch for in children:

- Not drinking enough fluids or eating
- Not waking up or interacting
- Irritability; not wanting to play or be held