

Influenza or “Flu”

This leaflet offers more information about influenza. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is influenza and why have I got it?

Flu (short for influenza) is a highly infectious and very common viral illness that is spread by coughs and sneezes. Flu occurs every year, usually in the winter, which is why it's sometimes called seasonal flu. It is highly infectious with symptoms that come on very quickly.

Colds are much less serious and usually start gradually with a stuffy or runny nose and a sore throat. A bad bout of flu can be much worse than a heavy cold.

Flu symptoms:

The most common symptoms of flu are:

- Fever, chills (38 degrees C)
- Shortness of breath or cough
- Runny nose
- Aches and pains in the joints and muscles
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Lack of appetite

What harm can flu do?

People sometimes think a bad cold is flu, but having flu can often be much worse than a cold and you may need to stay in bed for a few days. Some people are more susceptible to the effects of flu. For them, it can increase the risk of developing more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia, or it can make existing conditions worse. In the worst cases, flu can result in a stay in hospital or even death.

When are people most infectious?

People are most infectious soon after they develop symptoms. They can continue to spread the virus in coughs and sneezes for up to five days (seven days in children) while healthy individuals usually recover within two to seven days. People become less infectious as their symptoms subside and once symptoms are gone, they are no longer considered infectious to others. If you have had a transplant and/or received chemotherapy or other immunosuppression you might excrete the virus for longer.

Am I at increased risk from the effects of flu?

Flu can affect anyone but if you have a long-term health condition the effects of flu can make it worse even if the condition is well managed and you normally feel well.

You are most at risk if you are pregnant or have a long term condition such as:

- a heart problem
- a chest complaint or breathing difficulties, including bronchitis, emphysema or severe asthma
- a kidney disease
- lowered immunity due to disease or treatment (such as steroid medication or cancer treatment)
- liver disease
- had a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA)
- diabetes
- a neurological condition, e.g. multiple sclerosis (MS), cerebral palsy or learning disability
- a problem with your spleen, e.g. sickle cell disease, or you have had your spleen removed
- are seriously overweight (BMI of 40 and above).

This list of conditions isn't definitive. It is always an issue of clinical judgement. Your GP can assess you to take into account the risk of flu making any underlying illness you may have worse, as well as your risk of serious illness from flu itself.

Contact your GP/pharmacy for your annual vaccine (flu jab) if this is the case.

What can I do to help stop the spread of the virus?

- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue when possible.
- Dispose of used tissues promptly and carefully.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and warm water or use alcohol gel to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face or to other people.

What do I do if I think I have flu symptoms?

- Limit contact with others.
- Contact your GP/local pharmacist for treatment advice and recommended flu remedies.
- If you are acutely unwell and/or are feeling worse despite advice from your GP and/or NHS 111 and need to come to A&E please report your symptoms at reception.

What if I am coming into hospital for a scheduled appointment?

If you have any flu-like symptoms, please follow this very important advice:

- If you are coming for a routine outpatient appointment please reschedule your appointment date if possible.
- If you are attending for day care treatment, please call the department in advance to inform them you have flu-like symptoms so that appropriate measures can be taken.
- If you are due to be admitted to hospital and have symptoms of flu or any other illness please call the number in your admission letter or the ward where you are being admitted so that appropriate measures can be taken.
- If you have been admitted into the hospital, during the winter season you may stay on a flu cohort ward which is sometimes established to meet the demands of the hospital. Please follow any Infection Prevention & Control requirements which may be necessary.

Help us prevent the spread of flu

- If you have a fever or flu-like symptoms do not visit our hospital.
- Relatives and friends should not visit if they are unwell, especially with any flu like symptoms.
- Inpatients who know they have relatives or friends coming to visit are asked to remind them of this precaution before they arrive.
- Cover nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing.
- Clean hands regularly.

Who can I talk to?

If you have any questions about your condition, please talk to one of the nursing or medical staff.

For further information please contact:

If you have any questions or concerns about *influenza*, please contact Infection Prevention and Control on 020 8725 2459 (Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 5.00pm) or out of hours please consult the following websites:

NHS Home website: <https://www.nhs.uk/>
Public Health England website: www.hpa.org.uk
The World Health Organisation website: <http://www.who.int>

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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