

Understanding the Flu: Types, Symptoms, and Treatments – Charles P. Catania, MD

As cooler fall weather rolls in, the flu season also prepares to make its annual entrance. Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a highly contagious virus that spreads through droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. It can also linger on surfaces, making them potential pathways for the virus to reach our noses and mouths. In the United States, influenza leads to tens of millions of illnesses and thousands of deaths every year, underscoring the importance of awareness and prevention.

There are 2 Types of Influenza: A and B. Influenza Type A typically emerges early in the flu season and accounts for more than 75% of all cases. On the other hand, Influenza Type B tends to peak later in the season, often surfacing in late February or March. There are differences between Type A and Type B. Type A viruses are diverse, with multiple subtypes, including the well-known H1N1. In fact, all four major flu pandemics in the past century were caused by Type A viruses. Conversely, Type B viruses only circulate among humans and are divided into two primary lineages. Type B evolves at a slower pace than Type A, so it generally leads to shorter, more predictable flu seasons. Despite these differences, both can lead to significant health impacts, and each year specialists work hard to monitor global flu patterns to anticipate how the viruses might mutate.

If you contract the flu, you can expect to experience symptoms such as sudden fever, chills, muscle aches, fatigue, and respiratory issues like a cough or sore throat. Most healthy individuals tend to recover in 3 to 7 days, although some symptoms, particularly cough and fatigue, may linger for up to two weeks. Interestingly, earlier beliefs held that Type A infections were more severe than Type B. However, recent studies indicate that both types can result in comparable rates of hospitalizations and deaths among adults. Children may experience more severe illnesses from Influenza Type B, highlighting the need for vigilant monitoring and care. Rapid flu tests are available at many doctors' offices, which can distinguish between Influenza A and B, although they often exhibit low sensitivity. For more accurate detection, doctors can conduct P.C.R. tests, although these don't significantly change treatment plans.

When it comes to treating the flu, the focus is on alleviating symptoms and supporting the body's immune response. While there are antiviral medications, such as Tamiflu, prescribed for severe cases or those at high risk (like older adults, pregnant women, and individuals with chronic health conditions) most people might not see substantial benefits from antiviral treatment. For those recovering at home, health professionals recommend staying hydrated, resting, and using over-the-counter medications to manage fever and discomfort. However, if symptoms worsen or if severe signs occur (such as a sustained fever over 102 degrees, difficulty breathing, or severe chest pain) seeking medical attention becomes crucial.

In conclusion, while the flu can be serious, understanding its dynamics can help us prepare better for the flu season. Vaccination remains one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of contracting influenza, and public health officials recommend that everyone aged 6 months and older get the flu shot annually. Awareness of symptoms and proactive treatment can also make a significant difference in outcomes, allowing us to navigate the flu season with greater confidence and health.

Please remember that PentaHealth carries the Influenza vaccine, and you can call one of our offices to acquire the vaccine at any given time. If you or a loved one is feeling sick, please call us first, or come to one of our many walk-in options listed on our website. PentaHealth takes pride in providing the care when you need it – 7 days a week!

Dr. Charles P. Catania is the Medical Director for PentaHealth, he is Board Certified in Family Medicine and Hospice Medicine. He received his medical degree from the American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine; medically trained in England; and completed residency at Underwood Memorial Hospital in Woodbury, New Jersey, where he was named Chief Resident in 2009 and served on the New Jersey Academy of Family Physicians Board of Directors.

Dr. Catania has been in a private practice setting since 2010 and has been named “Readers’ Choice Top Doc” in South Jersey Magazine in August 2013, and “Top Doc” by his peers in Mainline Today Magazine in 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Dr. Catania has an interest in all facets of family medicine. He enjoys spending time and getting to know his patients on a personal level and providing care when they need it most. He loves working our walk-in hours and in our PentaHealth Today clinic on Sundays.

He treasures time with his wife and children, and he takes pride in bringing a very personal and friendly experience when caring for his patients here at PentaHealth.



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