

hand hygiene

I'm a Seasonal Scourge That Sickens Millions

It's the most wonderful time of year! No, I don't mean the holidays (although I can put quite a damper on those). I'm talking about the season when I'm most outbreak prone, causing mild to severe illness in an estimated 8% of the United States population each year.

It's sometimes difficult to diagnose me, as my symptoms can mimic other viral or bacterial illnesses: feverish feeling, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body/muscle aches, fatigue, and headaches. I also require specific tests to confirm diagnosis, but even that doesn't necessarily help get rid of me.

I'm a virus, you see, so while antivirals are an option, sometimes I'm left to run my course. Treatment has also largely shifted to prevention in the form of vaccination and hand hygiene.

Vaccines are typically quadrivalent or trivalent; there's even a nasal spray vaccine available. They say everyone 6 months of age and older should get a shot every season because antibodies against viruses encountered in the past can't protect people from new strains that can be very different immunologically.

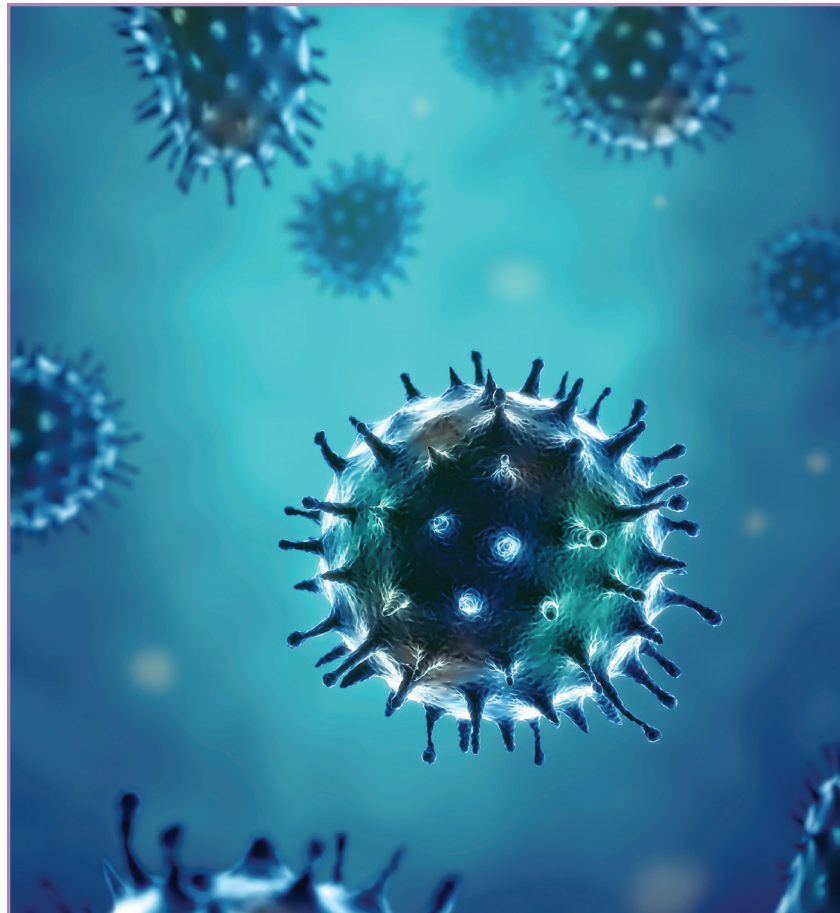
I come in 4 varieties, 3 of which are known to affect humans. I'm also constantly evolving season to season—sometimes within a single season—as I try and outsmart the antiviral drugs available and the seasonal vaccine makeup.

Did you know I can be passed around in a group of people up to 6 feet away? I can spread via direct transmission, via airborne aerosols produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or through hand-to-eye, hand-to-nose, or hand-to-mouth transmission, either from contaminated surfaces or direct personal contact.

Infected people may be able to infect others 1 day before they even know they're sick, and up to 5 to 7 days after getting sick.

In certain at-risk populations, including the elderly, people with certain chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease, pregnant women, or children younger than 5 years old, I can cause complications, including viral pneumonia, secondary bacterial pneumonia, sinus infections, and worsening of previous health problems such as asthma or heart failure.

I can also wreak havoc on people with weakened



immune systems, such as those undergoing cancer treatments, those on anti-rejection drugs who recently underwent an organ transplant, those who have been on steroids longterm, or those living with HIV/AIDS.

I'm the reason for many a missed day of school or work, and I typically sneak up on people with a sudden onset of symptoms.

Who am I? **ICT**

Influenza