

INFLUENZA

(Flu)

What is influenza?

The flu is a respiratory illness caused by viruses. It spreads easily from person to person. The flu can cause mild to severe illness, and may lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu shot each fall. People usually become ill with the flu in the fall and winter. Influenza does not affect people all over the world at the same time. People in some countries may be ill when people in other countries are not.

How will I know I have the flu?

You will suddenly become ill one to five days after exposure to the flu. The flu will last two to seven days. You may have a fever, cough, headache, muscle aches and fatigue. Children may be nauseated, have diarrhea or vomit, but not without the flu symptoms listed above.

What to expect

- Fever registering from 102-104°F. This could last up to 4 days.
- Chills
- Headache
- Aches and Pains – these may include muscle aches and chest discomfort. Some pain could be severe.
- Fatigue and weakness ranging from moderate to severe and could last up to a few weeks
- Extreme exhaustion is common in the early stages of the illness
- Stuffy or runny Nose
- Sneezing
- Sore throat
- Cough – characteristics of a flu-like cough are moderate “dry” cough that does not produce sputum. The cough could last anywhere from a few days to a couple of weeks.

What should I do if symptoms appear?

- Stay home until fever is gone for 24 hours without the use of medicine.
- Tylenol or acetaminophen for fever and pain control
- Rest
- Drink plenty of clear fluids, and limit caffeine intake
- Avoid smoking or alcohol use
- *Prevent spreading the infection by adequate hand washing, using utensils and covering your mouth when sneezing or coughing.*
- Warm salt-water gargles

When am I contagious?

The infectious period for the common flu usually lasts from 1 day before the symptoms appear to a week after.

How does flu spread?

Flu spreads from an ill person to others through coughing and sneezing.

Who should get a flu shot?

Everyone who is able should have a flu shot each year. Some people are more likely than others to have medical complications from the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says it is important for these people to get a flu shot every year. Persons with high risk for flu complications and serious disease include:

- Children aged six months to five years
- Pregnant women
- Adults older than 50

- Anyone with certain chronic illnesses
- Family members or health care providers of persons at high risk

Healthy people aged five to 49 may get the nasal flu spray (FluMist®) vaccine.

When should I get a flu shot?

You should try to get a flu shot in the fall or early winter, even if many people are already sick with the flu. You can get a flu shot at any time in flu season.

Where can I get a flu shot?

Most health care providers, local public health agencies, drugstores, and even some grocery stores offer flu shots. One place is not better than another for getting the shot.

Why do I need a flu shot every year?

The influenza virus changes every year as it makes its way around the world. Public health providers and people who make flu vaccines decide each year which kinds of flu are most likely to make people sick. They put the top 3 kinds into the vaccine. Since the viruses are almost never the same from year to year, the kinds of influenza in the vaccine changes each year. The vaccine only protects you from influenza for one year.

Are there medicines I can take if I get sick with influenza?

You should get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids when you have the flu. You may take antiviral drugs if they are prescribed within 2 days after you become ill. They shorten the time you are ill.

What should I do to protect myself and my family from the flu?

- Washing your hands often during the day is your best defense. Wash your hands before and after eating, going to the bathroom, or touching pets, phones, or keyboards. If you cannot wash your hands, alcohol-based hand cleaner may be used if your hands do not look dirty.
- Stay home from work or school when you are ill, and encourage others to do the same.
- Stay away from others you know are ill. You are less likely to become ill if you stay at least three feet from someone who is coughing or sneezing.

Can I get the flu more than once?

Yes. The virus that causes the flu changes every year. Most people will get the flu several times in his or her lifetime.

The single best way to protect yourself against the flu is to get vaccinated each year.